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O F T H E T I M E S :  
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O C C A S I O N A L O B S E R V A T I O N S  
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The Writings of HERBERT, SHAFTESBURY, BOLING-  
BROKE, HUME, GIBBON, TOULMIN, &c. &c.

By JOHN OGILVIE, D. D.

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*There shall come in the last days SCOFFERS.* 2 PET. iii. 8.

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obstructed in the former instance by the influence of passion, prepossession and prejudice. These will ever interfere in the determination of questions tending to regulate the actions of men, or to prescribe their gratification. And the effect arising from them will be proportioned to the force with which they act, co-operating with the circumstances in which individuals may be placed.

It is by the prevalence of those principles that the explanation of Christian doctrines and institutions, contained in the writings of the ablest interpreters, and the arguments brought from other sources, to establish the truth of our religion, have been prevented from operating with their full effect upon the minds of young and inexperienced readers. Biassed by motives of which they do not perceive the energy, they are partial to representations that tend to justify their prejudices or their actions. Hence their inquiries, if they make any inquiry, are carried on superficially. And while they hear the friends of religion with seeming approbation, a secret but strong prepossession takes place in behalf of their opponents.

Of these observations the consequence appears to be, that the cause of Christianity may be served essentially by him who shall point out the secret motives whereby many persons are induced to reject it, and who determines their effect. For he who sees the concealed reasons of his choice laid open, will no longer be a stranger to their influence. As soon, likewise, as this purpose is accomplished, pleas that are favourable to religion will be reviewed with attention, and will produce their proper and natural consequence.

“ But in what manner are the prejudices of which you speak acquired, and by what characters may they be known? Do the advocates of infidelity, as you call it, employ any artifices to fix prepossessions of the kind you mention? And can you render it evident that they take advantage of certain weaknesses and natural propensions, in order to accomplish purposes prejudicial to revealed religion, instead of carrying on an appeal to the powers of reason and understanding? If these questions shall be answered to our satisfaction, we will take up the matter upon that ground whereof reason appears to determine

mine the boundaries; and being guarded against the arts by which we have been fascinated, we will weigh with impartiality the arguments on both sides of the question."

This, my young friends, is the point to which I propose to conduct your research in the following Inquiry. To the questions, therefore, above mentioned, you may consider it as forming a reply. My great purpose is to convince you, by comparing with each other the theories which they who would subvert Christianity attempt to substitute in place of its doctrines, that you will find no firm footing in any other track, should you be induced to quit the plain and open path of revelation. With the great end of doing justice to the excellence of this religion, I have shunned no objects that were presented in the course of my research. I have compared its tenets with those of Pagan philosophy, and have placed the conduct of its Author in opposition to that of an eminent ancient philosopher, in circumstances precisely similar. By the former comparison, the consistent representation of its teachers is rendered peculiarly

liarily conspicuous. By the latter, honour is reflected upon the character of its Author.

Ascending in order to discover the causes of infidelity to motives, concerning the efficacy of which, every reader is qualified to judge. I appeal in these pages to the senses and feelings of men, as powers by whose decision I am willing to abide. And that their dictates may make a more permanent impression upon the heart, I have availed myself in a work, where the stiffness of close philosophical discussion is purposely avoided as much as possible, of the methods of expostulation, and of appeal.

Among all the species of disquisition, the polemical is perhaps the most unpleasant to a man endowed with any portion of sensibility. It is to be regretted, that the various hypotheses which men have framed in the great fields of religion and of morals, render this disquisition unavoidable in many instances, by him who occupies a department in either. I reflect with pleasure, that the task of controverting the opinions of former writers, falls incidentally into the present attempt,

tempt, of which it is by no means the principal object. The authors upon whose sentiments I have been obliged to animadvert, are qualified to do much injury to the cause which they condemn, by the high estimation in which they are held. The opinions likewise which they appear to adopt, are so specious and seemingly rational, as to be embraced by young readers in particular, without hesitation or suspense. Of such opinions, when placed immediately in my view, I have endeavoured to detect and to expose the fallacy. It is not necessary to say much in this place concerning the manner of animadversion. The reader will judge for himself, what objects this animadversion respects, and with what propriety it may be applied.

The subject of the following Inquiry, is among the few points of real importance which have escaped examination in any regular and connected detail. Attempts have indeed been made to estimate the manners of the times, of which the religious principle must ever contribute in a great measure to fix the character. But no performance, either in our own or in any foreign language,  
respecting

respecting the causes, which, by introducing universal scepticism, threaten to subvert the influence of this great principle in the present age, has fallen into my hands, or has come to my knowledge. At the same time, every lover of mankind, who attends with deep concern to the alarming progress of opinions that have this tendency, will with success to an attempt of which the purpose is to obstruct their efficacy. On these accounts, the good natured reader will perhaps be inclined to overlook omissions, which, in the examination of subjects more universally canvassed and understood, might expose the author to just reprehension.

Such is the work now offered to the public, and such are the motives of the writer. Without urging so hackneyed a plea for its publication as the request of friends, he may be permitted to observe, that among those who have perused the present attempt, not without approbation, as being adapted to the end with which it was undertaken, he may number men in whose candid impartiality, as well as discernment, he has reason to place the justest confidence. To these, likewise,

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he may add the sentiments of some men of distinguished eminence in the republic of letters, whose favourable opinion both of the plan and execution of this Inquiry, as he has not the honour of being personally known to them, cannot be impressed by the partiality of friendship. His best acknowledgments are due to both for advices of which he has endeavoured to avail himself in conducting it, and for observations which have contributed essentially to its improvement.

Conscious of the rectitude of his intention, he bespeaks the attention of his young readers in particular, to a subject wherein many of them are deeply interested. Their approbation, and that of the public in general, will give him pleasure, principally as being an evidence that the work may be beneficial to the causes of religion. To their censure (if it shall be general) he will submit with silent and with respectful deference. The satisfaction, however, of reflecting upon having *attempted* to promote the best interests of men, and to enlarge their happiness ; this satisfaction, of which the friend of mankind can alone be susceptible, is independent of either.



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INQUIRY

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S E C T I O N I.

*General Remarks on the Religious Principle.*

**T**HERE is not perhaps any general truth which the history of all nations placeth in a clearer light, and establisheth by more convincing evidence, than that which respects religious sentiment, as being congenial to the nature of man, and  
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characteristical of the species. Contemplate in the mirror of historical narration that immense theatre, upon which so many new and diversified scenes are successively presented as subjects of observation. You behold as objects placed at the extreme points of distance, the philosopher of Athens recommending to his disciples the practice of virtue as being self-sufficient to the purpose of happiness; and the savage of India ferocious and brutal, unsusceptible, it would seem, of other impressions than those that arise from sensual gratification. Betwixt these the disparity is so great, that we cannot without difficulty consider them as beings to whom a common designation may with justice be appropriated. What then are the general marks and signatures of mental resemblance wherein we recognize the nature of which both participate? Let us view them with this purpose when employed in the celebration of any rite that is expressive of dependence upon the Sovereign of the universe. Let us hear the language of the heart when in circumstances of distress it recurs to the fountain of life and of happiness. Let us reflect upon the desire and expectation of immortality, as being characteristical



teristical of MAN in all ages and situations \*. It is by those general features of the mind constituting the religious principle, more than by any conformation of corporeal members, that points of similarity are made known which indicate the same order of beings.

\* Is this affirmation true ? some readers will be ready to ask. Can a proposition be said to be established by universal consent, which hath been called in question, and even rejected by many among the wise and the learned in the most enlightened ages ? We do not dispute the truth of this remark. But the opinions of a few philosophers concerning this important subject, are of no consequence when opposed to the general voice of mankind, to prove that the belief of immortality has not been universal. For we might say, with the same propriety, that men are not in general agreed, that matter is a solid extended substance, because some philosophers deny that these properties belong to it, or that universal consent does not establish the evidence of sense, because they have likewise attempted to invalidate it, as that their notions are of weight in the present instance. In fact, the testimony of a Carribbean savage to the truth of this doctrine is of more efficacy to establish it as a natural and general sentiment, than the exceptions of all the philosophers that ever existed are to prove the contrary. For the assent of the former is the voice of nature, unbiassed by prejudice, passion, or example ; whereas these may concur in suggesting the arguments of the latter ; nor can himself determine the degree of their influence.

This universal sentiment may therefore be regarded as that point in which the passions of men, considered as radii diverging upon all sides in various and in opposite directions, are found at last to be concentrated.

It is not our present business to investigate the causes at any length to which the prevalence of this principle ought to be ascribed. In general, we may remark, that a consciousness of frailty and of dependence is one of the first sensations of which the mind becomes susceptible, as soon as it acquires any knowledge of itself, and of surrounding objects. From this consciousness we may readily suppose, that many religious duties, and acts that indicate awe, veneration, and gratitude, are derived. The duty of prayer, the rite of oblation, and the act of thanksgiving, have their original in common in a general sense of dependence, and tend to conciliate the favour of that Being, to whom they ultimately refer. Without enlarging on this subject, we may observe, that he whom experience renders sensible of certain dangerous propensities which he cannot eradicate, and whose views are ever gloomy and contracted

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when they are not carried forward into immortality, must feel the force of the religious principle, while he considers the Deity either as a Creator or Governor, and while he addresseth Him in these characters. The mean likewise whereby the effect of this great principle shall be weakened or subverted, will, at the same time, impair or overturn his happiness in life.

But is this principle, upon the whole, beneficial or baneful to the human race? Have not wars, devastations, massacres arisen from it? Are not illiberal prejudices, false and narrow conceptions, intolerant zeal, hatred, persecution, and madness, to be traced up in many instances to this, as being the source wherein they originate? Let us grant that these evils have arisen from this principle, seen in false and in terrifying lights; what is the consequence? Enquire, my young friend, before you form any final estimate, not what are the occasional effects of a sentiment so universal; but, what is its natural purpose, where the mind is disposed to feel its energy, and to carry its rules into practice. In the former case of occasional effects, you will find,  
that

that the evils which we have enumerated, far from indicating any tendency in this disposition to render mankind unhappy, are wholly to be ascribed to the violent passions and obstinate prejudices of individuals. Of these, as influencing the actions of men, history exhibits the most striking examples in all ages. And he who contemplates their effect in less interesting situations, and when they are impelled by weaker motives, will cease to wonder at that which they have produced when stimulated by the powerful inducements, and by the great objects of religion. In the latter instance, on the other hand, the natural tendency of this principle, the mind, without entering into any tedious or difficult process respecting the purpose or aim of this sentiment, may acquire satisfaction concerning this matter by a few simple and easy questions. The first of these will relate to the perfections of the supreme Mind, and to the various characters in which he is represented. The second will respect the relations wherein men stand to each other as members of society; and the tendency of this principle to promote union, love, and mutual forbearance. The last will probably regard its purpose

pose to promote the private happiness of the individual.

When those general inquiries are resolved in a satisfactory manner, all that can be said against a disposition of which the end is apparently so excellent, must fall to the ground. That the best and happiest institutions may be perverted to bad purposes by the passions and prejudices of men, is no doubt equally true, as it is that tools framed by the ablest artificer for a certain end, may in unskilful hands become the instruments of much mischief and disorder. But in both cases the aptitude to a first and ultimate design remains unquestioned. And from this design, the intention of the Author, or constructor in the first instance, is rendered indubitably conspicuous.

No man perhaps ever meant seriously to debase the great and original aims of the ordinances and doctrines of religion, or to call in question its utility. For, to acquire just notions concerning the perfections of God, and the various branches of duty arising from the knowledge of this Being, and of ourselves,

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is without doubt to gain knowledge from which the greatest and most beneficial purposes may result. And the tendency of the religious sentiment as it has been explained, to prompt us to obtain this knowledge in its utmost extent, requires not deduction to be rendered evident.

Two questions appear to arise from this view of the subject, of which the solution is attended with some difficulty. If it is the immediate design of religion to promote the happiness of mankind, we may naturally ask, whence it has happened, that men have endeavoured in any age of the world to subvert or even to weaken its influence? They who have examined this matter particularly, will be still more solicitous to learn, why the attempts that have been made with this intention characterize society only in its civilized state, and have been carried into execution particularly by men of superior knowledge and penetration? Of those questions we may observe, that the last respects a historical fact, the evidence of which will be produced in another part of this inquiry. Assuming it at present as a truth, we are led to remark, that attempts of  
this

this kind originating only in civilized society, seem to indicate causes peculiar to that state, and existing in no other, as being those to which such attempts are ultimately to be ascribed. It is by no means our intention to affirm, that there is any state wherein either guilt or ignorance might not suggest a wish unfavourable to the religious principle. The savage, at the time when he considers an unhappy event as an indication of the anger of his gods, would no doubt gladly embrace any mean by which his terror might be removed or alleviated. But this miserable wretch is unhappily ignorant of the sublime science of metaphysic ; a science whereby he might be taught to disprove his own existence, as well as to deny that of his Maker. Without therefore knowing that he is a machine constructed for certain purposes, or for no purpose, whose existence will terminate with the pulsation of his heart, he is condemned to adopt a religious system that represents him to be accountable, dependent, and immortal.

Leaving therefore these barbarians to the guidance of nature, let us contemplate society

ties in which artificial manners and opinions infinitely diversified are supposed to indicate an advanced state of civilization. A little reflection will convince us, that there are here two classes of men, who, although they agree in the general purpose of exterminating religion, yet pursue this end from motives of a very different kind, of which the efficacy is proportionally varied. These are the original authors of plans framed with the purpose above mentioned, and who endeavour, by expedients which we shall afterwards enumerate, to render them as acceptable as possible;—and those who, without any proper examination of circumstances, readily subscribe to their opinions. Our examination of the former will lead us to consider, what influence the love of singularity and an ill-directed ambition exerts in the sphere of religion. Our observations, in the same manner, upon the conduct of the latter class, will display the powerful effects respecting the choice or rejection of principle, that arise from passion, from example, and from the desire of imitation.



It is no doubt a delicate as it is an arduous attempt to trace up many actions, which we contemplate with a mixture of curiosity and of astonishment, to their causes existing in the mind. In some cases this task is peculiarly difficult. For when a resolution has been formed according to the bias of inclination, prejudice is ready either to conceal the real motive of our choice, or to divest it so effectually of whatever is disagreeable, as that it is rendered upon the whole an apparent object of approbation.

Among those who are dupes of this self-imposition, charity will teach us to include many professed advocates of infidelity, as well as their disciples. For the honour of human nature, let it not be said, that men of the first class are wantonly doing mischief, and have no other purpose in view, while they attack the religion of their country, than that of raising a monumental trophy to their own vanity from its ruins. Let us rather believe, that, contemplating the whole matter through the medium of prejudice, they appear to themselves to be men of enlarged and noble sentiments, whose plans will be productive

of universal emolument. Their fellow men, who are Christians, they consider as being the slaves of superstition. And it is, in their estimation, a design equally glorious, to emancipate them from the power of this intellectual tyrant, as it is to restore civil liberty to those who have been deprived of it; by the death or overthrow of their oppressor.

Men who have viewed Christianity and its followers in this false point of light, will no longer be insensible to the secret motives of their opposition, if these shall be placed clearly before them. Should an impartial inquiry therefore discover to them, that, when actuated in appearance by the love of truth, they have in reality been impelled by the desire of singularity, their eyes may be opened to the nature and to the dangerous consequences of their enterprise. A man of probity, although he may not be convinced of the truth of our religion, will yet cease to persuade others of its falsehood, when he becomes sensible that the belief of it is productive of essential emolument to mankind. By whatever sensation of pleasure likewise the remembrance of certain successful efforts to obstruct its influence

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ence may have been accompanied, nothing will arise from it that is adequate to the painful recollection of prejudicial purposes effectuated from motives of contracted and selfish gratification.

But it is not to causes by which men have been induced to oppose the evidence of religion that our inquiry is wholly to be confined. Among the many disciples whom they have gained over to their party, are we to believe that the greater number have examined the arguments of those authors, so as that they can assign a reason for their *disbelief* of Christianity? Whatever may be the case of a few individuals, we hope to convince many readers, in the course of this inquiry, that they have decided concerning this important question without any proper examination of principles. We propose to shew them, that their decision has been powerfully influenced, if it has not been dictated, by motives apparently so remote from this subject, as hitherto to have escaped observation.

As inducements of the present kind operate most effectually upon the young and inexperienced,

experienced, it is to them that the following remarks, respecting their nature and consequences, are principally addressed. He who has studied the writings of our modern Sceptics and Deists, must have observed, that the *way of reasoning* is but one method employed by them, to render their opinions universally prevalent, and that by no means a principal one. Their purposes at all times have been, to bring the passions of men to act in their behalf, and to captivate imagination. The means employed with this end are various, appropriated, and interesting. At the same time, the effect is greater in the event, as the operation of causes that lead to it is more concealed. He therefore will do no unacceptable office to society, who shall counteract the latent influence of those causes, by placing them in a just point of view ; and who shall endeavour likewise to divest of its efficacy the specious representation by which they are enforced.

Among the many causes to which we may ascribe the infidelity of the present age, the following appear to me to be those that principally conduce to this purpose.

1. The

1. The love of singularity, or an inordinate desire to extract novelty from every subject, and, in particular, from points that have been formerly canvassed.

2. A propensity to reject whatever bears the stamp of vulgarity, and to conform our principles, in the same manner as our dress, to the prevailing taste and fashion of the times.

3. A desire of imitating the manners of men whom we have been taught to esteem very highly, and of appearing to adopt their opinions.

4. Our natural inclination to reject those tenets as being false to which our actions are irreconcilable, and to adopt the contrary.

5. Certain charges of a very dangerous tendency, respecting either the general scheme of Christianity, or its peculiar doctrines; the nature of its evidence, or the character of its teachers; of which the effect is heightened in the writings of its adversaries, by all the arts of plausible reasoning, insinuation, ridicule, and abuse.

From

From these general efficient, standing detached from each other, various incidental topics arise, from an examination of which, the principal points will derive benefit. These therefore we shall discuss, as they fall into the subject, separately, with some attention. After having investigated in this order the sources of infidelity, we propose to appropriate a section to the causes that are productive immediately of sceptical fluctuation. Concerning the parts thus enumerated we may remark in general, that, while each stands so distinct from the other as to form a compleat object, when contemplated apart; yet all coalesce to the accomplishment of a general purpose.

## S E C T. II.

### *Of the Love of Singularity.*

**I** Am aware that some lively readers may urge a very plausible objection against the love of singularity, as being a cause of modern infidelity. They may tell me, that I discover little knowledge of mankind by undertaking to prove this proposition. Such knowledge, they may observe, would convince

vince me, that the love of singularity is favourable to the cause of Christianity, instead of being prejudicial to it, in polite society. For, in the fashionable world, the defender of Christian, or indeed of any religious doctrines, would be deemed to have followed a singular course; while he by whom both are reprobated, would join his voice to that of the multitude. Thanks, methinks I hear them say, to those illustrious friends of religious liberty, Tindal, Collins, Chubb, Woolston, Mandeville, and to their successors in the same glorious line! Thanks to those philanthropists, who, by shutting up for ever the temple of immortality, have relieved their followers from many a superstitious observance! Thanks to those fathers of a numerous offspring, we can reply to the question, "What is thy name? Our name is *Legion*;" "for we are many \*."

I acknowledge it, gentlemen. I have the honour (for I am so unfashionable as to think it an honour) to find, that, in this acknowledgment, I am partly supported by the authority

\* Mark v. 9.

of an Apostle, in the words which I have placed as a motto upon the title page. Yet I must still consider the love of singularity as a cause of infidelity in the present as well as in past ages. Permit me to lay before you my reasons for having adopted this opinion.

The term singular, or singularity, is not always used, when applied to theoretical subjects, to denote the tenets which the few embrace in opposition to the many. It will bear an application likewise to any body of men, whose religious notions, as being professedly different from those of the community to whose civil ordinances they are subjected, are deemed to be peculiar. No matter whether they who apparently adhere to the established religion, are or are not sincere in their profession. Their external obedience to its rites and institutions is a sufficient indication of their belief. The present is exactly a case of this kind. A large proportion of mankind has been known for many ages by the appellation Christian; an epithet used to specify those who embrace that religion which was published and propagated by Christ and his Apostles. This religion, which, whatever may have been  
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the dogmas of particular sects, yet comprehended all these through a succession of centuries, time hath now consecrated as an object of veneration. The circumstances therefore of an establishment, and of the respect exacted by the laws of Christian nations to the public institutions of our religion, the concourse brought together at its festivals, and the seeming devotion as well as the number of its votaries, are altogether such evidences of the faith and practice of men in general, that ideas highly pleasing to human vanity are suggested to those who avowedly reject it as being an imposition. By a conduct so contrary to that of the multitude, they flatter themselves with the thought of discovering a daring spirit, and singular penetration. Such indeed is the influence of the desire to tread in unbeaten paths, that I am apt to think (excuse me, gentlemen), that in a certain case it may be rendered as favourable to the cause of Christianity as it is at present to the pleas of its adversaries. For should the religion of nature be substituted with every external advantage in place of the ordinances of the gospel, this desire would render these ordinances as much apparent objects of rational approbation, as

it represents them in the present instance to be the contrary.

But upon what proof, it is asked, do you found your assertion respecting the powerful efficacy of the love of singularity? This question ariseth naturally from the preceding observations; and demands a distinct and explicit reply. In answer to it, after having explained the nature and general tendency of this principle, I propose to consider what has been its more immediate influence upon religion from the earliest ages. An account of the various means by which a desire so universal hath operated upon the practice of mankind, is at the same time a pleasing and a curious inquiry. Such an inquiry seems to require that a historical detail of effects derived from this cause only, should be placed before the mind. By means of this detail, circumstances may be pointed out as being derived from this passion, which have escaped the attention even of him whom it hath most powerfully influenced. From a view likewise of progressive consequences derived from one source, and exhibited in succession, the conclusion

clusion naturally suggested will be rendered obvious and convincing.

Man, in his civilized state, occupies two capital departments, of which one is appropriated to speculative, and the other to active employment. To the former are referred the objects of scientific research : to the latter is ascribed whatever history exhibits as illustrious in example. The operation of the love of singularity may be traced equally in both. Among those speculative inquirers who are actuated by this principle, I rank, without exception, all the inventors and maintainers of paradoxical theories and hypotheses, or of systems that contradict the senses and experience of mankind. Among those, upon the other hand, whose practice it has influenced, I consider all, without exception, as being comprehended, from him who set fire to the temple of Ephesus, to the man who set out on an aerial tour, with wings provided for the purpose, from the pinnacle of St Sophia at Constantinople ; who have wished to be distinguished from all other men by new, astonishing, and unexampled actions.

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But before we proceed any farther in this track, another principle of action, seemingly allied to the present, but widely different in reality, challenges particular attention. The intelligent reader will have perceived that this principle is the love of fame ; a passion which ever takes deepest root in the noblest and most exalted minds. It is the province of the historian, or biographer, to relate the actions which these causes have produced upon the theatre of life. Our business at present is to observe, that, in all cases whatever, an obvious difference takes place betwixt the love of singularity, and the desire of glory properly so called. For, granting the ultimate end of both passions to be the same, we shall find, upon reflection, that the means which they employ as conducing to its attainment, are essentially distinct. Thus, to excite admiration by great actions, or by important discoveries, is the purpose of the desire of glory when justly regulated. But *novelty* is the great object of him who is actuated by the love of singularity. And in pursuits distinguished by this character, propriety and intrinsic excellence are often overlooked. In the sphere of scientific investigation, such a man will appear

to be in search of something which, if it shall not be confirmed by just, may yet be rendered acceptable by plausible representation. And his intention in this manner is often carried successfully into execution. While we ascribe therefore to the former principle works, as well as useful and ingenious arts, that are held in universal estimation; the conceits of the witling, the chimeras of the specious but fanciful theorist, the dreams of the sectarian, and the subtleties of the sophist, are to be derived from the last.

From this enumeration of effects arising from the love of singularity, it appears that, although frequently productive of unimportant consequences, this passion is not always accompanied by those which are pernicious. Where the mind is incapable to form any comprehensive scheme in consequence of its debility, or where the subjects of its research minister only to curiosity, the desire above mentioned will never be offensive, and may sometimes be pleasing. Bad consequences arise from it, only, when a certain union and propension of intellectual powers qualify their possessor to carry it with too much efficacy  
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into subjects of universal importance. Every reader is acquainted with characters of the first kind, which are too inoffensive to demand animadversion. But our remarks on those of the latter class require to be exemplified.

An attentive observation of men will enable us to discover two classes upon whom the desire of treading in unbeaten paths hath ever exerted remarkable influence. The first is of those whose reasoning powers, although great and comprehensive, are yet employed to illustrate and to support theories that are derived from imagination. The second consists of men who possessing likewise a considerable share of both faculties, but not that proportion of the latter which riseth to the sublime of sentiment or of description, are yet qualified to strike out new and unfrequented paths on the field of speculation. These, by applying their talents to subjects wherein the attention that cannot be fixed by greatness is attracted by novelty, are led to frame paradoxical hypotheses, and to lose themselves in abstracted and unintelligible refinements. From the first arrangement of faculties are derived the theories of Burnet, Malbranche,

Malbranche, Fenelon, and other authors of unquestioned ingenuity. The plans of those performances, without being accommodated to the test of philosophical investigation, yet exhibit evidences of elegant design, and of masterly execution. From the latter, we may consider as being derived, all those metaphysical subtleties which are so necessary in order to render us perfectly well acquainted with the nature of things, and by means of which, the sphere of rational inquiry hath been extended in the present happy and most enlightened age, to the unspeakable entertainment and emolument of mankind. It is to men endowed with this just proportion, this perfect union of intellectual powers, that we are indebted for the discovery of the *materia subtilis*, the fine elementary particles of which thought is compounded. The human head is considered by those great philosophers as a glass hive, whereof the transparency remains unsullied to their eyes, only by the employments of the busy inhabitants. In the jostlings therefore, and *vibrations* of these intelligent atoms, they observe those pure and intellectual ideas to originate, of which the contemplation is inexpressibly

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grateful

grateful to men who possess certain happy and finely attenuated organs.

Of those philosophers beheld with admiration by congenial spirits, a man of common thought may venture to form a different judgment. Incapable of entering into their sublime and abstracted speculations, he will perhaps think, that acute metaphysical talents, applied to perplex and to darken truths which they ought to elucidate, will be adequate to all the above mentioned important purposes. He in the mean time who is possessed of them, must find a consolation in the novelty of his discoveries, or in some other circumstance, to balance the pain of reflecting upon their detrimental effects. But,

*Impavidum ferient ruinæ.* HOR.

Our philosopher intent upon accomplishing his own purpose, will not permit its consequences to discompose his serenity.

Thus much we have observed respecting the influence of the desire of singularity, and its general mode of operation. Our subject requires



requires in what follows, that we should consider this passion more particularly, as having been prejudicial, in all ages of the church, to the interest of religion.

Among the various sects which arose during the first ages of the church, and which increased through succeeding centuries, an attentive observer will remark, that there was not one, whose founder called in question the general evidence of revealed religion, or who denied the commission of its author. The heretics of those days perverted indeed the meaning of the sacred text, or availed themselves of various readings, when these were accommodated to their purpose. Upon some occasions, they wrested the natural construction of a sentence, or objected to a very obnoxious paragraph as being interpolated. But characterised as they are by a strange mixture of folly and of extravagance, they do not appear to have called in question the necessity of revelation, nor to have doubted concerning the authority of that which is called Christian. On the contrary, their tenets were founded in passages of holy writ, of which the divine original was universally

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acknowledged. It is indeed true, that the patrons of the old religion persevered, as might have been expected, for some ages in opposing Christianity. But this opposition had its origin in that steadiness wherewith the mind adheres to the first principles which are impressed upon it. And of those it was not without much difficulty, and after many unsuccessful efforts to support them, brought at last to acknowledge the fallacy. The advocates of Paganism were not therefore in general men who had revolted from Christianity; and who, like our modern freethinkers, had set up a new religion in opposition to it. They defended institutions, which the vulgar of all nations contemplated as sacred; and a religion recommended by such circumstances of external splendour and decoration, which have in all ages attracted the attention and admiration of mankind \*.

But

\* In the work of an ingenious and learned writer of the present age, ‘ Gibbons’s History of the Decline and “ Fall of the Roman Empire,” an unfavourable and partial representation is given of the state of the world at the time when the Christian religion was introduced. The reader will not be displeased if upon the present occasion we examine his account of this matter particularly, with

But what it is asked, became during all this time, of the desire of singularity? And whence

a purpose of pointing out his inconsistencies, and of supplying his defects. In order to account for the rapid progress of our religion, this author describes the incredulity and scepticism of the Pagan world, as having been universal at the time when it was introduced. “ The fashion of incredulity had, he tells us, been communicated from the philosopher to the man of pleasure or business, from the noble to the plebeian, and from the master to the menial slave who waited at his table, and who eagerly listened to the freedom of his conversation, &c. Even the people, when they discovered that their Deities were rejected by those whose rank and understanding they were accustomed to reverence, were filled with *doubts* and apprehensions.”—“ Their (the people’s) love of the marvellous and supernatural, their curiosity with regard to future events, and their strong propensity to extend their hopes and fears beyond the limits of the visible world, were the causes which favoured the establishment of polytheism. Some Deities of a more recent and fashionable cast, might soon have occupied the deserted temples of Jupiter and Apollo, if in the *decisive moment* the wisdom of Providence had not interposed a genuine revelation fitted to inspire the most rational esteem and conviction, whilst at the same time it was adorned with all that could attract the curiosity, the wonder, and the veneration of the people.” From the whole our author concludes, that those who are inclined to pursue this reflection, instead of viewing with astonishment the rapid progress

whence was it that this passion, if its influence on conduct can be traced, did not prompt

progress of Christianity, will perhaps, be surprised that its success was not *still more rapid*, and *still more universal*. Gibbons's History, vol. i. p. 601. 602. It is clear from the concluding sentence of this quotation, that Mr G. considers his account of the state of the world at the time when Christianity was introduced, as being even more than adequate alone, to the effect which is said to have arisen from it. Without insisting upon the obvious superfluity of his *other causes* upon this supposition; and on the unnecessary trouble which this gentleman has given both to himself and his readers according to his own account in his subsequent detail; I shall confine myself to the ground which he hath here marked out, by making some observations upon the exceptionable nature of his assertions,

It had been well if our author, who is so liberal of authorities upon every other occasion, had favoured us with some in the present instance. Without such authorities, certain *incredulous* readers will be apt to consider the whole story of men of pleasure or business catching the fashion of incredulity from philosophers; of menial slaves imbibing unfavourable notions of the established religion, (just at this critical instant!) from the conversation of their masters at dinner; of the deserted temples of Jupiter and Apollo; and of a revelation flashing upon the astonished world at this decisive moment;—as the work of a warm imagination. Let us however take the matter as this author hath stated it. His account not only appears to be unsupported by evidence, but even to contra-

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prompt some daring spirit to follow the same course respecting religion in those ages, which

dict the testimony of historians, whose works are quoted in his performance with high and just approbation. His account is unsupported by proof. For granting the truth of all his affirmations concerning the incredulity and scepticism of nobles and philosophers in the age of Augustus, it will not, I apprehend, follow, that those men either had rendered their notions universal, or that they were able to do so. Attention to the known facts of history will convince us, that incredulity and superstition, considered as characterising different classes of men at the same period, are by no means incompatible. It will even discover to us an age wherein both predominated, which was as much enlightened as that of Augustus. I refer to the æra at which Socrates flourished, as being an age distinguished at the same time by freedom of sentiment, incredulity, scepticism, and superstition. It is well known that in the schools of philosophers the various subjects of religion and morals were treated with a compass and energy at this time which hath never been surpassed at any period whatever. The great doctrine of immortality was then likewise evinced by probable arguments to the enlightened and penetrating few. Poetic fables were distinguished from the truths of philosophy. And men who chose to reason sophistically, had an opportunity of carrying scepticism into all the branches of science. I need not however remark to any intelligent reader, that those inquiries, far from spreading from the noble to the plebeian, exercised only the philosophers and their disciples. The death of Socrates, and the recal of Alcibiades from the Sicilian

which hath been pursued with so much success at a later period? To these questions I answer,

Sicilian expedition, to answer the charge of having defaced the statues of Mercury, are incontestible proofs among many similar circumstances of the superstition that at this time characterised the Athenians. If this then was the case in the age of Socrates at Athens, it remains to be proved, that various opinions, which *may* subsist without subverting each other, produced effects so fatal to the ancient, and so favourable, as a Deist would term it, to the new superstition, in the age of Augustus, at Rome. But the facts which this author himself mentions from the best authority, prove that this superstition prevailed as much during the latter age, as in the former. For, if the temples of ancient Deities were deserted at the time when Christianity was introduced, whence arose that strenuous opposition which was made at *so decisive a moment* to its establishment, an opposition carried on by men who appear to have stood up in defence of rites which they despised, and of temples which they had abandoned? Whence is it that Pliny, Tacitus, Suetonius, and other respectable authors represent, as quoted by Mr G. the persecuting spirit of those sceptics, and infidels, who according to this hypothesis must have butchered their fellow men for refusing to embrace principles which they themselves at the same instant renounced and reprobated? If in short the reign of Pagan superstition terminated so nearly in the days of Augustus, whence is it that we find the deserted temples reoccupied according to our author's account of the matter, and the Roman Senate consulting the Sybilline books, in order to " gratify the *superstition*

answer, that the passion itself operated at that time with all its usual energy. It received

of *trembling mortals*," in the days of Aurélian? See vol. 1. p. 361. Hence, we may ask, is it, that even in the reign of Theodosius, when Christianity had been during successive ages the established religion of the Empire, we find the succession of those men who had deserted the temples of Jupiter and Apollo, sending "four respectable deputations to the Imperial Court, to represent the grievances of the priesthood and the senate, and to solicit the restoration of the altar of victory?" Gibbons's Hist. vol. 3. p. 73. Granting the account of the extinction of superstition to be just in the former instance; why has not this writer ascertained the period of her resurrection, and pointed out the means whereby her former influence appears to have been regained in the latter? From this assemblage of circumstances, and from many others which an attentive reader will remark, it is obvious, that our author's attempt to account for the rapid progress of Christianity from the state of Pagan superstition at the time of its introduction, is absurd and inconsistent.

But these, although capital, are by no means the sole errors of which the preceding representation exhibits evidences. In his account of the causes of polytheism, he hath omitted the principal efficient of its success and establishment. This conduct is more extraordinary, as the omitted causes happen to be those that are least favourable to his own side of the question. Not to hold the reader in suspense, a little reflection and knowledge of this subject will render it evident, that the religious

ceived only from certain circumstances a peculiar direction. There never perhaps were  
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system of the Greeks and Romans became prevalent in consequence of the multitude of its Divinities, the splendour and decorations of their temples, and the affectionate regard of a people to men who had been their first leaders and instructors. By means of the first expedient, Deities were appropriated to the occasions of their worshippers. By the second, these Deities were placed in a manner before their eyes, as being personally present. By the last expedient, the spectator was taught to view them as beings who regarded their circumstances, and were disposed to answer their requests. It was not to “that love of the marvellous and supernatural” by which the vulgar is distinguished, that the first of those causes owed its efficacy, which had in fact its origin in the wants, the weakness, and the follies of mankind. By these, men were led to fly to the shrines of tutelary Divinities, and were prejudiced in favour of a religion whereby they were accommodated to particular situations. A polytheist who found every part of nature peopled with ethereal beings, from the throne of Jove, to the groves, the fountains, the walks, and even the hearth which he frequented, became highly partial to a religion which came home to his hopes, his wishes, and his employments. He considered these Beings as personally present, while he gazed upon statues of them exquisitely proportioned, and animated by the art of the sculptor. When he observed in the same manner the honours paid at public festivals to the Gods, or heard in private life of fortunate occurrences, ascribed to their interposition and favour,



more busy and daring innovations in any age whatever, than in those that preceded the

vour, his prepossession in their behalf was improved into confidence, and his respect into submissive and profound veneration. A man of Mr G——'s acknowledged good sense and sagacity cannot be unacquainted with the effect which circumstances such as these have ever produced upon the human mind, and will ever produce. He must know likewise, as will immediately appear, that the Christian religion, far from offering external objects of adequate efficacy to the contemplation of man, holds up to him one self-existent, invisible, incomprehensible Being, who demands no sacrifice, can be represented by no image, resides in no temple of human architecture, and accepts of no oblation but that of the heart. "The pure  
 " and sublime idea, says our author, which they (the  
 " Christians) entertained of the Supreme Being escaped  
 " the gross conceptions of the Pagan multitude, who were  
 " at a loss to discover a spiritual and solitary God, that  
 " was neither represented under any corporeal figure  
 " or visible symbol, nor was adored with the accustomed  
 " pomp of libations and festivals, of altars and sacrifices." P. 541. 626. What! Is this religion without Gods, altars, libations, temples, statues, symbols, festivals, or sacrifices, that revelation which you pompuously describe, as "being adorned with all that could attract the curiosity, the wonder, the veneration of the people?" P. 602. Is this the idea which the Pagan multitude framed of the object for whom they deserted the temples of their ancient Deities, and abandoned all the rites of their religion? You say, Sir, that "they were at a loss to  
 E 2 "discover

the establishment of Christianity, and followed after it. But the love of singularity in  
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“*discover* the solitary God” of the Christians. Is it then the pleasure which the Pagan multitude received from contemplating what they could not contemplate, and from conceiving what “*escaped their conception*,” that the Christian religion is indebted principally for its progress? I will not insult my readers understanding by commenting upon these absurdities. The work of this author contains many others that are equally striking, of which some examples will afterwards be produced. At present I shall leave him when I have observed, that, by omitting to mention causes that contributed largely to the establishment of polytheism, although not to the progress of Christianity, this gentleman hath failed essentially in doing justice to his subject.

Let us then compensate for this omission in the present case, by placing both sides of the question before the reader, ~~that~~ he may judge for himself. Polytheism became the established religion of many nations, 1. by being accommodated to the wants and weakness of men to whose situations its Divinities presiding over every part of nature were happily and seasonably adapted. 2. To their love of sensible representation, gratified by magnificent temples, by splendour of decoration, by the pomp of festivals, and the solemnity of sacrifice. 3. We may safely ascribe its favourable reception among men in early ages to the high estimation in which they held their first leaders and instructors, whose Apotheosis in the judgment of a whole people commenced at the hour of their dissolution. That  
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one class of men, and that of novelty in another, were amply indulged in those days, by the

the Christian religion received benefit from none of those causes is a truth that cannot be called in question. Even of those which our author enumerates, we may remark, that they were far more beneficial to polytheism than to Christianity. An inhabitant of Rome has "his love" of the marvellous and supernatural" more highly gratified by the auguries of an aruspex at which he might have been present, than by the relation of miracles which he must have received from testimony. "His curiosity in" the same manner with regard to future events" received high gratification from the nature of those incidents to which the oracular responses were supposed to refer. The fate of a war or of a battle, the means of reconciling an offended Deity ; whatever in short respected the prosperity, hopes, desires, employments, and final catastrophe of an individual, were circumstances that engaged him in an inquiry the most deeply interesting. On the other hand, the attention of the Christian was drawn to the fall of empires, the fate of monarchs, to the appearance of a Messiah, the rejection of the Jews ; and finally to the universal prevalence of the religion of Jesus. Of these objects we may remark, that although sublime and magnificent, they must have been less interesting to private persons than the former for reasons of which the influence is strong and universal.

That a religion therefore *comparatively* inadequate "to attract the curiosity, the wonder, the veneration of the "people ;" containing likewise commands to which the passions

the various theories and modes of explanation to which the doctrines, precepts, and peculiar tenets of the Christian faith naturally gave occasion.

Ambition instigated her votary to become the founder of a sect by which his name might be perpetuated. He wished to astonish the world by publishing some new and sin-

passions of men are naturally repugnant; promulgated by a mean man, born in the obscure corner of a despicable province, propagated after his death by a few fishermen, who were lost in the boundless extent of the Roman world, over which they wandered without influence, learning, riches, or authority: That a religion thus published, supported, and constituted, should yet have subverted, in the course of a few generations, the established rites, ceremonies, and worship of so many nations: That, overcoming every obstruction arising from the learning, the opulence, and the power of its adversaries, it should have risen from the *Hamlet of Bethlehem* to the throne of the *Caesars*; covering "the whole earth" in its progress: Dan. ii. 35. These are circumstances which Christians do not think themselves justly chargeable with credulity, in ascribing to the interposition of an extraordinary Providence. They judge that Providence may have favoured this religion, because its moral institutions are beneficial to society. And in the present instance, they ascribe its progress to extraordinary Providence; because in tracing it, we contemplate an object, *cui nihil est simile aut secundum*.

gular discovery. This discovery or tenet it was necessary to found upon the sacred text, as being the standard of truth which was referred to by all parties. It is indeed true, that tradition, which soon began to acquire authority, may be viewed as a cause of heresy somewhat different from the former. But let us remember, that this tradition was traced up to the sacred writers, from whose supposed inspiration all its efficacy and importance was derived \*. Stimulated therefore by passions which he was unable to suppress, the lover of singular opinions endeavoured to render these prevalent in the first instance, by impressing upon the minds of men a high idea of his own learning, sanctity, and abilities. Having obtained this capital point without much difficulty in those days, he was enabled either to falsify traditionary evidence without the danger of detection, or to support his notions by strained explanations of the sacred text, among men who were prepared to receive them with implicit submission.

\* We refer the reader for information on this subject, in all its extent, to *Banage's Histoire des Juifs*, tom. 9. liv. 9. and *Fra. Paolo's Istor. del Concil. Tridentin.* L. 2. c. 5.

To these causes it is no difficult matter to trace up the tenets of many sectarians in the first and middle ages of the Christian church. We shall see afterwards that some of their principles cannot be deduced from other originals than those that are here pointed out. But those men, who set out with a design of imposing upon others, became the dupes of their own artifices, by imposing at last upon themselves. They who are best acquainted with human nature are perhaps most sensible of the approach that is made towards the belief of any principle, by him who begins with wishing to find it true. The truth of this remark, when applied to theological subjects, will be rendered sufficiently evident, when points that are connected with it fall to be investigated. At present it is proper to observe, that the steadiness wherewith some ancient heretics adhered to their tenets, seems to indicate, that wrong measures had been taken with the purpose of convincing them of their errors \*. Instead of being humbled

\* It is well known, that Marcion in particular became a heretic, in consequence of his father's rigour and resentment, which he found it impossible to efface. For his principles, see *Justin. Apol. 2d.* and *Dial. contra Marcion.*

by persecution, they were flattered by it with the idea of having their names transmitted with honour to posterity as the founders of certain religious orders or sects. With this end, they were induced first to promulgate doctrines, and at last to believe in them, which, although published on account of their novelty, they had received originally with some hesitation. In this case, reason acted in a subordinate sphere under passions that were inflamed by suffering; and imagination dwelling upon its own evanescent objects, conceived them at last to be realities. The truth is, that the art of extirpating heresy by toleration, and of defeating the purpose of the schismatic by contemptuous indifference, this art, so necessary, and so effectual in a well ordered society, was not understood in those ages \*. Be this however as it

\* This observation will need no comment to those who are conversant in ecclesiastical history. The lives of the primitive fathers present to us few other objects, during a succession of ages, than those that are attendant upon the rise and the suppression of heterodox opinions. Among them we find the zealous Tertullian stigmatized as a heretick, after having wrote against those men with much animosity; and Origen displaying his zeal for the orthodox, by whom he was afterwards treated with

it may, the desire of advancing singular opinions, and of supporting these by explanations of the sacred text, may be safely mentioned as the sources of many heresies in the first ages of the church.

Is this an uncharitable or an unsupported affirmation? Let us bring it to the test. Among those fathers of the church who succeeded its first authors, we meet with no name more illustrious than that of the celebrated Origen. It is almost needless to say, that the genius, knowledge, strength of reason, and indefatigable diligence whereby this man was characterised, place him altogether in the highest rank of eminence.

But surely we must not consider all the

much severity. It is said that the former was compelled to embrace the heresy of Montanus. The sufferings of the latter are well known. A great part of the life of Athanasius, who was himself proscribed, banished, and persecuted, was consumed in disputes with Arius, and with his followers, as that of Chrysostom was in his contest with Severianus and Theophilus. *Vid. Nicéphor. lib. 4. c. 12. Euseb. Eccles. Hist. lib. 2. c. 25. Pamphil. Apol. ap. Phot. Cod. 118. Socrat. Scholast. lib. 1. c. 8. Id. lib. 6. c. 11, &c.*

theories



theories that we meet with in the writings of Origen, as truths either confirmed by the same rational evidence, or as having impressed similar conviction upon the thought of the author. The solid arguments employed in defence of the Christian religion by its great advocate will ever be distinguished by those criterions from the chimeras of the same author, which have their origin in imagination. Those are clear indications of a mind satisfied with the choice of a religion, and able to give “a reason of the faith that is in it.” These, on the contrary, are illusions arising from the love of singularity, and from the desire of framing new and extraordinary schemes. To such causes we may ascribe with propriety the following dogmas among many others which are to be found in the commentaries of our author: That the world is a rational animal, capable of knowing good and evil, and of receiving reward or punishment; that, as other worlds have preceded the present, others will likewise be framed after it; that our souls have sinned in a state of pre-existence; that the destiny of nations is written in the stars; and other

reveries equally absurd with these, although perhaps of a more pernicious tendency \*.

Some admirers of the zeal and the genius of Origen will be ready perhaps to censure this impeachment of him, upon account of its seeming severity. But, with all my veneration for the name of this great man, I cannot suppose that strained and extravagant conceptions which have no relation to the happiness of mankind, were thrown out by him with any other purpose than that of evincing his inventive talents and superior discernment. At any rate, the proof that these discoveries are authorised by the sacred text, cannot be equal to the evidence by which the truth of revelation is ascertained. Their general purpose, likewise, and tendency are widely different. We may on this account safely pronounce, that the conduct of the writer cannot in both cases have been directed by the same motive, a desire to promote the truest interests of mankind. What

\* To the author of such tenets, surely we may affirm that the ridicule of Shaftesbury would be applied with more propriety, than the fire and brimstone of Bellarmine and Baronius. *See the article Origen in the Diction. Histor.*

we suppose, therefore, in the advocate of Christianity to originate in the love of truth, we ascribe in the fanciful theorist to the desire of singularity.

It is not necessary upon the present occasion to enter into a detail of the principles of the Gnosticks \*, and of the later Platonists, in order to illustrate this observation. The history of the dark ages offers to our view many heretics, who attempted to justify their absurd tenets by misinterpreting passages of the sacred writings. It even placeth before us disciples of those heresiarchs still more extravagant than their masters, who endeavoured to propagate their absurdities by violence and massacre, while they called themselves the followers of “the Prince of peace.” I might appeal to the conduct of some secta-

\* In the work of Irenaeus contra Hereses, the reader will find some account of the heresies of the Gnosticks, which in that author’s opinion are sufficiently confuted by being enumerated. But a far more satisfactory and entertaining history of those celebrated heretics, is contained in the work of the learned, the copious, the eloquent Mosheim; a work in which the reader of taste will remark, of what graces the most unpromising subject becomes susceptible when it is treated by a man of genius.

rians of the last and of the present century, as decisive evidence to the present purpose. For men will be exhibited in this progressive detail, who, animated by the love of singularity, have attempted to erect spiritual monopolies, by producing the scriptures as their charter. But an examination thus conducted would lead me too far from my subject.

The effects of this powerful principle, either when it is considered as affecting general characters, or as being rendered conspicuous in tenets of religion, have now been pointed out at considerable length. Strong and discriminating however as these are, we cannot fail to remark, that the principle itself operated within a very contracted sphere in those ages, in which investigation determined certain standards of faith ; certain fixed and permanent rules that were repulsive of its exertions. In the prosecution of our subject, we must consider this leading passion as enlarging its range, and as directed in the pursuit of new objects by circumstances of which we shall point out the efficacy. The effects that have arisen from this cause in later ages will be best accounted for, when we have  
viewed

viewed the nature of the subjects that have been investigated in those ages, and the sources of their diversity. To these the present inquiry calls our attention.

At the time when Christianity, rising upon the ruins of Paganism, was gradually spreading over the nations, the mind was naturally employed in religious questions, of which we have seen that the discussion is at all times congenial to its faculties. Men were therefore busied in determining the most essential among the many tenets and doctrines of revealed religion. At this period, the interest of society required, that whatever respected the government and œconomy of the Christian church should be regulated by a plan accommodated to the circumstances of its members. We must remember, that the arts so highly valued, and so assiduously cultivated in the glorious ages of Greece and Rome, had at this time sunk in the general wreck of Roman greatness, now verging to inevitable ruin. Amidst the devastations of northern barbarians who overspread the empire, the tree of science, whose fruits are matured by sedulous cultivation, was torn forcibly

cibly from its place, and withered on the field where it had been reared with attention. A few remnants of this beautiful plant were indeed preserved in the repositories of the ingenious. But even there, these exhibited an imperfect representation of its original attractions. Let us add to all this, that the little learning of those miserable times was confined to the clerical order, and that real knowledge even among them was the portion of a very few. The people in general ignorant and superstitious, at the same time were ready to adopt any tenet of a spiritual superior who was supposed to possess profound erudition, and who commanded reverence by a dignified deportment. It must be acknowledged that in those days superstition and enthusiasm, the daughters, as they may be called, of ignorance, possessed the most extensive and absolute authority. In succeeding periods, reason circumscribed at once their power and their dominion.

Let us now lay these facts together, characteristic as they certainly are of the dark and middle ages of the church. Do they not point out to us the course which he who was  
ambitious

ambitious of gaining reputation and influence would follow, as most effectual to the accomplishment of his purposes? Do they not make it probable, that such a man, taking advantage of this state of things, would endeavour to render new and plausible theories the objects of universal belief? The ignorance and blind veneration of the multitude he would consider as means of carrying his design successfully into execution. The co-operation therefore of those causes, at the same time that it produced men who wished to be distinguished by novel opinions, directed their speculations to the line of religious inquiry. Hence are derived the many muddy currents *professedly* drawn from the pure fountain of inspiration, that contaminate the ground over which they are spread. Hence almost every portion of the sacred text gave rise to notions infinitely multiplied, of which the recital renders the ecclesiastical history of those ages a monumental record of the follies of mankind. Hence, in short, it is, that in characters of acknowledged excellence, we meet with qualities that are irreconcilable. For even good men, when viewed in different lights, seem to have been influenced by mo-

tives in less essential matters, which in those of more importance they were careful to repress.

As we approach in our inquiry towards modern times, we observe the face of things to assume a new and more promising appearance. The mind, depressed during the decline of science, appears to have been reanimated at the period of her resurrection. About this time, the intellectual powers awaking from their lethargy, began to contemplate new and diversified subjects of inquiry. And men impatient of having seen so long with the eyes of others, tried now to look abroad, and to enjoy prospects of their own. In this state of things, it is obvious that the love of singularity was no longer gratified by wresting the natural import of the sacred text, or by conferring imaginary importance upon some frivolous distinction. Fatigued with so long an attention to objects that were no longer recommended by novelty, the mind engaged in researches that promised more variety. Its thoughts in the mean time continued to be attracted to the great objects of religion.

Betwixt



Betwixt that zealous and obstinate adherence to unimportant points, that may properly be denominated enthusiastic, and that rejection of a whole scheme without examination, which is equally irrational; betwixt those, which may be denominated the two extremities of the scale of error, many gradations are interposed. And on some of these the deviation from truth is so slight as not without difficulty to be detected. In the present case, we have seen that the intermediate steps had been preoccupied at the period to which we have now brought our inquiry. The lovers of singularity, therefore, were compelled to seize the extreme points of distance, at which both were rendered peculiarly conspicuous by being placed in opposition.

Such then was the state of things when two classes of men filled up the vacant spaces on the scale above mentioned. Of those, the leaders of one party continued to impose upon the weak and credulous, by maintaining pretensions to superior sanctity, by an attachment to certain rigid precepts, and even upon some occasions by assertions of being under

der the influence of *inspiration*. By blending together with peculiar absurdity frivolous ceremonies and devotional exercises, enthusiastic reveries and inflexible perseverance, the errors, in short, of a bewildered imagination, and that uniformity of conduct which bespeaks a regulated understanding \* ; by presenting this *farrago* of incongruous circumstances to the mind, they at the same time highly gratified its love of novelty, and

\* William Penn refusing from religious motives to wear buttons on his coat, or to take off his hat to his father ; theeing and thouing the Sovereigns of England and of Germany ; and sacrificing to childish gesticulations, whatever might have been the object of his rational pursuit, is a wild enthusiast, or to speak more properly, an extravagant madman, whom we contemplate with a mixture of pity and of contempt. But what shall we say concerning this man, when we view him as the founder and legislator of a flourishing colony, which he established among selfish and bigoted neighbours, upon the noble principle of universal toleration : How respectable a place does he occupy in our esteem, when we consider him as the author of laws framed for the benefit of mankind, and carried into execution with inflexible perseverance. This union of absurdity and of consistence, although it has often characterised men when placed in certain circumstances, yet never perhaps was conspicuous in the same degree as it was in this personage, and as it continues to be among his followers.

wound

wound up its passions in the cause of religion to the utmost height of rapturous expectation. Visions, and extasies, the incoherent ejaculations of a convulsed disciple, deemed to be inspired and prophetic effusions; pretensions to miraculous powers; frantic gestures, sudden and violent emotions;—the scenes and expressions upon which ignorance gazes with stupid astonishment, fascinated for a time the senses of the multitude, and gained proselytes to doctrines thus strangely recommended.

But while those zealots were figuring at the summit of the scale, a revolution of a very different kind was taking place at its opposite extremity. To this revolution the persons above mentioned contributed principally, although not indeed with intention. For as soon as their efforts ceased to raise admiration, they became the subjects of derision and contempt. We may observe with truth, that this will ever be the case with high pretensions of what nature soever that are not supported by corresponding actions. In the present case, it had been well if the contempt which those men drew upon themselves, and upon their  
notions,

notions, had terminated at either object, or at both taken together. The passion which these originally excited was artfully directed to take a more extensive range, and to include the professors of a religion, of which it was said that the doctrines had given occasion to so many various and contradictory theories.

A new order of men therefore arose, who, deriving emolument from the present state of things, followed a course which, however singular and extraordinary, the preceding events seemed to justify. These votaries of reason, as they called themselves, setting out with high assumptions, and with claims that draw universal attention, called men from wrangling with one another about the doctrines of Christianity, to examine the evidences of its divinity. That an inquiry thus directed, promised ample gratification to the love of *singular* argument, is a truth that cannot be called in question. At the same time, as men were in general persuaded of the authority of our religion, and of its excellence, it became necessary to combat their supposed prejudices, in the first instance with wary circumspection. An attempt to gain too  
much

much at once would have terminated in exciting the indignation of men, instead of establishing rational conviction. Objections therefore were to be insinuated rather than formally proposed. And mankind were to be prepared for receiving new doctrines, by being artfully prevented from discerning all their consequences.

Attentive to these considerations, the first adversaries of our religion, acknowledging the possibility of a revelation, and even its expedience, object to the Christian dispensation only on account of its particularity \*. They appear even to be solicitous of reconciling their own notions to Christian laws and institutions, and of ingrafting scions of a foreign growth into a *stock* so vigorous, and

\* By this term, in Lord Herbert's estimation, was understood a religion not promulgated universally, but confined within the pale of a society or country : Thus, speaking of his universal church, he says, "*Quæ igitur particulari cuicunque ecclesiæ attexuntur encomia HUIC conveniunt ; a, quæ, quæ maxime recesserit maxime errori obnoxiam esse supra docuimus.*" *De Veritate*, p. 222.

of so long duration †. We shall endeavour to shew, by following the advocates of infidelity in their course, that their progress towards their present state of total inanity has been the result of slow and of successive efforts. Among their first leaders, Lord Herbert is often the advocate of Christianity; and even Hobbes is not always explicit or consistent in his declarations against it ‡. We know likewise that the licentious principles of the latter, far from being accommodated to the times in which he lived, excited horror and general

† The concession of Mr Blount respecting the necessity of ingrafting Deism upon Christianity, is taken notice of by Leland, as being clear to this purpose. Lord Herbert's repeated attempts in his two works, entitled, *De Veritate*, and *Religio Laici*, to reconcile his five articles to the doctrines of our religion, and even to shew that its ultimate purpose was to comprehend them, cannot escape observation.

‡ As this celebrated writer speaks, upon some occasions, concerning scripture as being the voice of inspiration, so his practice was so much conformed to his profession in this instance, that, having been taken ill at Paris, he received the sacrament according to the forms of the church of England, in the view of approaching death. See *Hobbes de Cive*, cap. 3. sect. 33. and *Hobbes Vit.* p. 59.

indignation.

indignation †. Of their successors, some attempted to overthrow the Christian dispensation, by representing the absolute perfection of natural religion \*. Others, as Blount, Collins, and Morgan, endeavoured to gain the same purpose by attacking particular parts of the Christian scheme, by explaining away the literal sense and meaning of certain passages; or by placing one portion of the sacred canon in opposition to the other ‖. A third class, wherein we meet with the names of Shaftsbury and of Bolingbroke, advancing farther in their progress, expunge from their creed the doctrine of future existence, and annihilate among them all the moral perfections of the Deity §.

† Of this, the complaints made in parliament against our author's writings, and the terror wherein he spent the last part of his life, his general dread of assassins, &c. are striking examples.

\* Of this scheme, Tindal and Bolingbroke are the patrons. *Christ. as old as the creat. pass.* and *Bolingbroke's works*, vol. 5. *pass.*

‖ See *Blount's account of a Deist's religion. Coll. grounds and reasons*, &c. *Morg. Moral Philosoph. pass.*

§ It is remarkable that although the noble authors mentioned in the text, agree in exploding the doctrine

Thus far the adversaries of our religion had carried their inquiries in the beginning of the present century. And it will be acknowledged that the love of singularity, whether we consider it as having acted a principal or a subordinate part in the accomplishment of those important discoveries, might have received from them very high gratification. One happy consequence in the mean time arose from this conduct; for by means of it not only was an examination carried into the collateral proof of prophecy and miracles of which the nature and efficacy were ascertained; but the scrutiny was extended to the doctrines and precepts of Christianity; to its laws and institutions. An enquiry of this kind founded upon rational and moderate principles, corresponds to the spirit of this religion,

of immortality as inadmissible, yet they differ widely in their notions of the moral attributes of the Supreme Intelligence. For, while the former magnifies the *goodness* of God, at the expence of his justice; the latter divests him of both perfections. Compare *Shaftsb. lett. on Enthuf. with Bolingbroke, vol. 5. p. 311*. Thus those authors entertaining incompatible notions of the Deity and of his government, agree only in depriving their fellow men of the only sure refuge to which human misery can have recourse. Such is the emolument of their philosophy to mankind.



religion, and is productive of salutary effects. Natural religion in the present instance gained by the investigation above mentioned, by means of which its truths were better understood at this period than at any preceding era. To the same cause likewise it is owing, that the excellence and comprehensive nature of Christian morality are ascertained beyond question.

But the strength of the adversaries of Christianity exerted in this formidable attack was at last exhausted. For the subject canvassed upon all sides, afforded no longer anything new to gratify the desire of succeeding innovators. What was to be done in this case? To have stopped short in this noble career, would have argued a pusillanimity, of which we cannot accuse those daring adventurers. A road therefore having been paved with infinite labour over the *chaos* of vulgar notions and prejudices to the regions of light, the successors of those who framed it have now pushed their research to the utmost possible length. In the present age therefore of discovery, our philosophical travellers, ambitious of imitating the activity of circumnavigators, and of

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surpassing

surpassing their intelligence, have penetrated in their own estimation to the utmost limit of those regions. And it is but justice to acknowledge that they are abundantly communicative of their information.

Peradventure, my young reader, thou may'st be solicitous to know, of what nature their discoveries are; and what intelligence they have brought from this terra incognita? This requisition, it must be confessed, is natural and proper. At the same time, the many new objects which in the writings of those authors are held up to be contemplated, render it difficult to make a satisfactory reply. From my desire however to gratify thy demand in the present case, I have extracted from their works some among the many tenets which they substitute in place of the great doctrines of the Christian religion. And that the summary may be as complete as possible, I shall arrange these under the heads of discoveries relating to the existence, nature, and attributes of God, and the production and government of the universe, and finally, to the extent and efficacy of moral obligation.

A simpleman will find it somewhat difficult to make the opinions of our modern apostles, that respect the Supreme Mind, cohere together in such a manner as to form any proportioned whole. For, while one of them entertains no doubt concerning the existence of this being \*, another will acquaint you, that he has met with nothing in his travels, but “ a blind nature impregnated with a great “ vivifying principle, and pouring forth “ from her lap without discernment or parental care her maimed and abortive offspring †.” While the former addresseth a prayer to “ the parent of nature” with some apparent reverence ‡, the latter assures us that “ while we argue from the course of “ nature, and infer a particular intelligent “ cause, we embrace a principle which is “ both uncertain and useless §.” Another great instructor of mankind will deny that there is any uncertainty respecting this matter. “ Nature, he will tell you, is invariably the

\* *Bolingbroke's works*, vol. 3. p. 353. 354.

† *Hume's Dial. on Natur. Rel.* p. 220.

‡ *Bolingbroke's Let. on Hist.* &c. p. 481.

§ *Hume's Philosoph. Ess.* p. 224.

“ same.

“ fame ¶.” And “ the order, and beautiful disposition of things,” far from arguing against the eternity of the world, are on the contrary the strongest confirmation of such a doctrine \*.”

From

¶ *Toulmin's Antiq. et Durat. of the world*, a fine.

\* You see a house beautifully constructed, and containing many splendid and elegant apartments. You simply ask, “ Who was the architect ? ”—Architect ! replies our philosopher. Mark the strength and solidity of the walls, the grandeur and magnificence of the pillars, the elegant turn of the colonades, and the extent and beauty of the piazzas. “ From all this I “ must conclude, that the contriver has been a man of “ genius.” No, says our author, you must conclude from all this, that no such contriver ever existed. I am intimately acquainted with the nature of those fossils, &c. of which the parts, “ although *seemingly* inanimate are perpetually in action.” Take my word for it, therefore, that these walls, colonades, piazzas, pillars, with all that elegant and ornamental drapery, have been determined by an *eternal* impulse, to assume their present form, a situation, in which, likewise, they will continue immutably fixed to all eternity. And those marks of design that, in the vulgar estimation, are indications of an architect and of an original, are “ the “ strongest confirmations” in the judgment of a philosopher, of a theory that excludes both one and other. Such are the arms wherewith Dr G. H. Toulmin assaults his Maker ! His battle, however, is not a dangerous

From these quotations it appears, that our authors are embarrassed in their notions respecting the existence of a Deity. And it is no easy matter to reconcile their theories with each other. But let us ask those of them who acknowledge that there is such a Being, what ideas they have framed concerning his nature and perfections? Here, my young reader, thou wilt be informed, that, according to their best judgment, GOD is a good†, and that HE is *not* a good Being‡; that the frame of nature is beautiful||; yet that all its springs and principles are coarse, unfinished, and inaccurate§. Nay, what is surely a singular discovery, thou wilt be taught to believe, that though the “mixed phenomena of nature” must be ascribed to

gerous one. His performance, in my opinion, demands no particular answer, although it is not destitute of rhetorical merit. By making men begin to look about them, it will most probably serve the cause which the author so earnestly wishes to overthrow. *Toulmin's Antiq. &c. ubi supra.*

† *Shaftes. lett. on Enthuf. ubi supra.*

‡ *Bolingbroke's works, vol. 5. p. 368.*

|| *Toulmin. Antiq. p. 198.*

§ *Hume's Dial. p. 215. 216.*

causes that have both goodness and malice, yet that those same causes of goodness and malice possess neither one nor other of these qualities \*.

Come

\* This seeming riddle demands explanation. Take the hypothesis of a celebrated author in his own words. "There may four hypotheses be framed concerning the first causes of the universe: That they are endowed with perfect goodness; that they have perfect malice; that they are opposite, and have both goodness and malice; that they have neither goodness nor malice. Mixed phenomena can never prove the two former unmixed principles. And the uniformity and steadiness of general laws seem to oppose the third. The fourth, therefore, seems to be by far the most probable." *Dial. on Nat. Relig.* p. 221. 222. Now let us place those four hypotheses together. Mark, reader, the consequence! The phenomena of the universe cannot prove perfect goodness or perfect malice, because they are mixed, or are expressive of both. Goodness and malice must therefore pertain, in some degree, to the causes that produced the universe; because, no being or power can confer qualities of which himself is not possessed. But, in the present instance, according to our author, an opposition would arise from two beings endowed with those qualities, of which we discover no traces in the universe. For the general laws by which it is governed are steady and uniform. Upon the whole, therefore, the most probable hypothesis, in our author's opinion, is the following: That goodness and malice are characteristic of beings

Come we now in our inquiry to the account that is given by our modern theorists of the birth and generation of things. You have heard most probably, my young friend, the beautiful allegory of the *mundane egg*, from which, Dame Nature transforming herself into a hen, is said to have hatched the god Phanes. Our self-taught philosophers, not perhaps quite so ingenious in their profession as Orpheus, will tell you, that the world is not an egg, but an immense cabbage, impregnated with the seeds of other cabbages or vegetables, which it throws out on all sides, bestowing in this manner order and organization without being sensible of it \*. According to others it is an animal possessed of vivifying power, with other discoveries of the same kind that are equally edifying and de-

beings who yet have neither goodness nor malice ; and consequently, that the causes of the universe have rendered its phenomena expressive of qualities, which those causes conferred without possessing ; and yet must have possessed in order to confer. A definition of the term absurdity cannot be better exemplified than by the present specimen. Philo, the author's sceptical dialogist, is the speaker upon this occasion. But, as his opinions are not impugned or confuted by Cleanthes, they appear to be those of the author.

\* *Dial. p. 132.*

lectable. One of those gentlemen concludes with apparent truth from the phenomena of the universe, and from certain historical facts, that the world must have been framed at no remote æra †. Another from facts to which he gives implicit faith, throws back its origin to a more distant period\*. And a third, as we have already seen, disproving the theories of his predecessors, and exalting this vegetable to a self-existing Divinity, finds it to be at the same time immutable and eternal ‡.

Nor are the discoveries that have been produced in the science of morals by the lovers of singular argument, inferior to those that have been recited, respecting the universe and its creator. For in their writings we learn with certainty, that the well known, although obsolete phraseology, right and wrong, justice, and injustice, by which women and children have been frightened in all ages, are like the oaths of a foldier, mere exple-

† Some ingenious remarks on this subject occur in the Dialogues on Natural Religion.

\* See *Voltaire's observations on the traditions and manners of the Chinese*, in his *Histoire Ancien. et Mod.*

‡ *Toulmin's Antiq. pass.*

tives,



tives, that have no importance or signification†. By those ministers the Supreme Being condescends to acquaint his creatures, that all the bonds of trust and of social intercourse are broken down, and that the practice of vice, instead of being prohibited, as detrimental to society, ought to be encouraged as being beneficial\*. From their discoveries, therefore, it is unquestionably evident, that every man may pursue that course in life which seemeth best to himself, without apprehension of future punishment, if he can be screened from it at present‡.

To sum up all, our philosophical adventurers have discovered, that the soul of man is mortal, and dies with his body§; that

† *Hume's Essays on the principles of Morals. Hobbes de Cive, &c.*

\* *Fable of the Bees.*

‡ Shaftesbury, in his letter on enthusiasm, obviously magnifies the goodness of God with this purpose. It is malice, he tells us, and not goodness of which we ought to be afraid. Mr Brown justly observes of this sentiment that it tends to unhinge society to the utmost of his power. *Essay on the Characteristics*, p. 247.

§ *Bolingbroke's works*, vol. 3. p. 522. 536. 557. *Hobbes Leviath.* p. 72.

man in fact has no soul, but is a machine consisting of certain wheels, pullies, pivots, &c. and constructed not without some ingenuity by that illustrious artizan CHANCE †; that

† *Dial. &c.* p. 220. 229. 230. I wish not to misrepresent the opinions of the celebrated writer, to whose last work I have referred so often. Let me observe, therefore, that Philo expresseth, in very strong terms, his belief of a Deity, such as he represents him. He even thanks this Being, or Mind, or Thought, that atheists are very rare. And, notwithstanding his love of singular argument, he professeth to pay to Him profound adoration. *P.* 232. But, as Philo's declarations upon this subject are contradictory, I construct his notions most favourably, when I consider him as excluding a Deity from the universe. For, horrible as is the idea of "a blind nature pouring forth her maimed and abortive offspring without care or discernment;" it is much better than that of an Omnipotent Tyrant, having neither wisdom, justice, goodness, nor any perfection that is the object of approbation, far less of affection or of gratitude. Judge, reader, in this instance for yourself. Would it not please you much better to think that this world was formed by a fortuitous concurrence of atoms, that it is an egg, a vegetable, an animal, or what you will; rather than to view it as framed by an intelligent Mind to be an immense Lazar-house, crowded with the victims of disease, and echoing to the groans of the miserable? When you contemplate this MIND as the cause of an effect so "full of vice, and misery, and disorder,"

that body has neither figure, extension, nor  
solidity;

“ disorder,” does any consolation that is adequate to the horror of this idea, arise from viewing Him as being perfectly indifferent to all the misery of which Himself is the author? And are you edified by being told that He hath implanted feelings in the hearts of his creatures, of which He is not susceptible? Such is the Deity to whom our author pays “ the most profound adoration.” *P.* 199. 228. He is, according to this writer’s representation, a malevolent principle without malevolence : At one time, “ an inaccurate and clumsy artificer, whose work is so lame as to involve individuals in ruin and misery :” At another, the author of “ such scenes of art and wisdom, such exquisite artifices repeated with wonderful variety, and with exact propriety, as to challenge all our admiration and astonishment.” A Mind, in short, He is, endowed with contradictory qualities, who is, at the same time, profuse and parsimonious ; and whose creatures are hostile, odious, contemptible, and admirable. Compare *p.* 200—221. 215—230. 232—219. 209. 219—230, and judge whether he who looks up to such a Being can seriously worship Him with “ profound adoration.” I repeat, therefore, that I construct his contradictory assertions most favourably when I consider “ a blind nature” as the object of his belief, rather than such a cause of all things as being entitled to his homage. To this idol, however, of his worship, like Nebuchadnezzar’s image with his legs of iron, and his feet of clay, does our author devoutly give thanks “ that Atheists are rarely to be met with.” To whom, Sir, let me ask, are your thanks addressed  
upon

solidity‡; that spirit, on the contrary, has figure and extension†; and, finally, that there

upon this occasion? Are they offered to that Intelligence who “ involves individuals in ruin and misery?” Are they due to the “ coarse Artificer, the Author of physical and moral evil, &c. &c. &c?” With much more reason may you thank Him for having so framed His work, as that His miserable creatures by denying His existence, may turn from objects that cannot be viewed with other feelings than those of horror and detestation.

I cannot dismiss the present shocking compound of absurdity and of blasphemy without doing justice to my sentiments of its author. The warmest admirers of Mr Hume cannot think more highly than I do of his writings, as models of correct and classical composition. His talents were undoubtedly of the first rate. And that they have failed to guard him from the charges of inconsistency and of absurdity, we must ascribe to his carrying the love of paradox, and of singular argument into the dangerous sphere of religion. *Dedicat. of his Dissert. p. 6. Dial. 228.* Men of free principles, but of inferior abilities may be benefited by pursuing this observation.

‡ In all your various senses (of the term *matter*), you have been showed, says Philonous, either to *mean nothing at all*, or, if any thing, *an absurdity.* *Berkley's Dial. p. 100.*

† Our conception of spirit, saith Mr Hobbes in his treatise entitled *Human Nature*, consists of figure without

there are neither body nor spirit in the universe †.

Thus, reader, I am enabled, by having the happiness to live in an age of singular religious proficiency, to trace the love of singularity in an historical detail supported by the best authorities, to its *ne plus ultra* of exertion and of influence. A full view has been exhibited of those important discoveries, which certain philosophical machines have made in their journies to the invisible regions. These you may compare at your leisure with the tenets and doctrines of Christianity, so as to judge concerning their comparative importance and verisimilitude. It must be acknowledged indeed, that a certain noble confusion, a seeming inconsistency, characterise the former discoveries, to which the latter, although published by various authors, and at distant periods, bear no resemblance. But let us reflect upon the many  
false

out colour ; and in figure is understood dimension ; and consequently, to conceive a spirit is to conceive something that hath dimension. *Chap. 11.*

† Verily, (saith Martinus Scriblerus commentating upon the precedent quotations), the conduct of the companions

false and contradictory accounts respecting this material world, which the renowned Ferdinand Mende Pento, and Captain Lemuel Gulliver, and \*\*\*, and \*\*\*\*\*, and other travellers of approved experience, have retailed in their narrations, voyages, journals, and adventures. We shall cease to wonder, after this review, at the incongruous relations of those daring spirits who in quest of truth have plunged into the unfathomed and infinite abyss. In the present state of things, therefore, you will do well, my young reader, to embrace the principles of Christianity as they are detailed in scripture. Your assent to the tenets of its adversaries you may suspend, although prejudiced in their favour, in hope that the genius of infidelity will raise up some new and creative mind to bring order out of confusion.

From the preceding detail of circumstan-

panions of my youthful days grieveth me much upon the present occasion. For, betwixt mine ancient and most worthy friends Berkeleyus and Hobbefius, of whom the former dissertateth concerning immaterial matter, and the latter, of material spirit; it seemeth unto me that both matter and spirit are expelled from the universe.

ces, an objection to the truth of our religion may be urged with much plausibility, which it is necessary to obviate. In the estimation of a Deist, it will be regarded as a very unfavourable phenomenon, that men became sceptics and infidels according to our own account, almost as soon as they became civilized and sociable. And he will pronounce concerning a religion that was embraced only during the dark ages, and was rejected at the reanimation of science, as of a scheme adapted to the reign of credulity and of ignorance, of which knowledge must ever be subversive. This objection to the Christian plan is by no means a new one. "In my zeal for Christianity, says one of her *true friends*, "I will add this farther to what I have said. "The resurrection of letters was a fatal period : The Christian system has been attacked, and wounded too very severely since that time." Again, "Christianity has been in decay ever since the resurrection of letters \*." To the same purpose an author of the present age, upon some of whose principles we have animadverted, informs

\* *Bolingbroke's Lett. Hist. Lett.* 5.

us, that “ the study of philosophy, when  
 “ introduced among the Christians, was not  
 “ always productive of the most salutary  
 “ effects : Knowledge was as often the parent  
 “ of heresy as of devotion \*.”

Nor are the advocates of Deism who speak of our religion as injured by scientific inquiry, less solicitous to represent its triumphs as having been gained in all ages over the mob of mankind ; and its spirit and institutions as accommodated only to

\* *Gibbon's Hist. of the Decline, &c. vol. 1. p. 614.*  
 These affirmations do not seem to be well founded. It is one thing to say that men of knowledge have propagated heresies, and quite another to affirm that their knowledge has been the parent of heresy. We have proved in the present section, that it is not to science or to the study of philosophy that we are to ascribe the heresies of the Christian church. According to Mr G——'s own account supported by the best authorities, the greatest heresies originated during the dark ages, and were not invented by philosophers. The most celebrated hereticks perhaps have appeared in modern times ; but not surely when the study of philosophy was first introduced among Christians. And, although it is true that those men were culpable who employed their knowledge of religious principles to propagate heretical doctrines, yet the cause of this conduct must be sought for, not in their knowledge, but in their prejudices and passions.

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the vulgar. The adversaries of Christianity, from Celsus to the author last quoted, avail themselves of plausible declamation on this subject. Origen mentions and refutes the charge of its ancient enemy. “ No Christians, says he, are to be found among men of knowledge or of understanding. The doctrines of their religion are adapted to the capacities of girls and boys, of beggars and children, of slaves and fools. And among them only have its teachers made converts \*.” In the spirit of this ancient adversary, an ingenious modern speaks of our religion as being adapted to “ the very meanest capacities †.” Its descriptions according to this writer are childish: its authors betray ignorance of the celestial phenomena; even its moral system is defective; and the objects which it offers to a man of science must excite his contempt.

By those assertions, and by this representation, the Christian religion is injured very essentially in the opinion of persons who are entering into the world. Captivated by pre-

\* ORIGEN p. 137. 141.

† *Charact. Schol. p. 3. sect. 1. Miscel. 2. sect. 3. &c.*

tensions to learning and elegance, they imbibe the spirit of modern philosophers, and listen with pleasure to their declamations. By means of these, they acquire prejudices of the worst kind against a religion that was received during ages of ignorance ; that fled at the approach of science, and of which the doctrines, precepts, language, are baits calculated to decoy the mere vulgar. The tendency of this objection is obvious. The answer to it introduceth the second cause to which we ascribed modern infidelity : “ A propensity to reject whatever bears the stamp of  
“ vulgarity, and to conform our principles  
“ to the prevailing taste and fashion of the  
“ times.”

Let us then suppose that a man of science impressed by this account, although not convinced by it, shall sit down with a serious purpose of comparing the moral precepts of our religion with those of Pagan philosophy, and of judging from such a view concerning their real nature, importance, and tendency. Solicitous to investigate so momentuous a subject on all sides, let us suppose, that he shall compare the characters and motives of  
the

the teachers of Christianity, with those of the most eminent ancient philosophers. And let us judge, that he shall sum up his inquiry into the end of this religion, with an examination of its effects. It is worth while to consider, what will be the consequence of such a trial in the present case, as it may tend to obviate plausible and popular objections. To this purpose we mean to appropriate the following section. Let us just remark, before we enter into the subject, that it is unnecessary and would be improper, upon the present occasion, to select examples of sublime beauties in the sacred writings that may be said to bear the stamp of divinity. The readers are not many who are capable of discerning those beauties so as to feel the force of an argument derived from them. And to the few who are thus qualified, the works of some masterly writers render such a selection unnecessary \* in the present instance. The moral precepts and doc-

\* The noble performance of Dr Lowth *De Sacra Poesi Hebræorum*, and the late translation of Isaiah by this admirable writer, are works on this subject, with which no reader of taste is unacquainted.

trines of our religion, opposed to those of Pagan philosophy, form objects of which every intelligent reader is qualified to judge and to decide. Yet no work has fallen into my hands wherein a regular examination has been carried into this subject. By following out the present line of inquiry, therefore, I shall endeavour to prove, that Christianity, far from owing any part of its influence to superstition and ignorance, has on the contrary contributed principally to enlighten, as well as to civilize mankind. By tracing likewise the relation that subsists betwixt religion and science properly so called, I shall attempt to evince, that the influence of the latter is most universal, where the principles of the former are best understood.

### S E C T. III.

*Of Christianity as the subject of scientific inquiry.*

THE questions to the solution of which we propose to appropriate the present section, are these that follow. By what means did it happen that doubts respecting the authority and the evidence of Christianity were coeval with

with the period at which men emerged from ignorance? and is not a fact thus attested, highly unfavourable to this religion, as implying that it must be injured by scientific research?

The first question naturally suggests an inquiry to be carried into the genius and spirit of Christianity. For, upon hearing it proposed, a man of reflection will ask, whether the authors of this institution submit their tenets and principles to free disquisition; or are solicitous to repress investigation, and to shroud themselves in darkness. Our first view of this subject must convince us, that the question must be determined in favour of our religion and of its authors. For, instead of repelling this spirit of disquisition, it will appear that these men encourage it both by precept and by example. Of one of those teachers it is said, “that he was himself learned in all the wisdom of Egypt\*.” Another who was eminent in knowledge, not only speaks of learning in general as a valuable acquisition†, but even quotes the sentiment of a

\* Acts vii. 22.

† Acts xxi. 3.

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heathen poet, when occasion calls for it, with approbation ‡. A third, still more explicit upon this subject than the former, exhorts us, by examining the evidence of revelation, “to be able to give a reason of the hope that “is in us \*.” And, to sum up all, the author of this religion commands his followers, in a rational spirit of liberty, to “search the “scriptures,” which contain the proofs of immortality, and the testimony that establisheth his mission and character †.

Two reasons may be offered for which the presumption arising from those declarations is favourable to the Christian cause. The first is, that such professions indicate integrity in their authors, and their firm belief of the doctrines which they taught to mankind. The second is, that this conduct is opposite to that which impostors have pursued in all ages, and which indeed their schemes most obviously suggest. Granting therefore that those authors have deceived the world, we must acknowledge that the course which

‡ Acts xvii. 22.

\* 1 Pet. iii. 15.

† John v. 39.

they have taken is singular, and by no means consistent with political practice. These points require to be more particularly discussed.

In all cases whatever, men are prepossessed in behalf of those, who laying aside all reserve, and making no conditions of a suspicious nature with the world, submit their claims or principles to the examination of mankind. Every doubt of unfair and disingenuous practice is removed by the apparent candour and sincerity which this procedure bespeaks. But this is not its sole effect. Other and more important advantages arise from it. Of doubtful matters our judgment is often regulated by the sentiments of those men who are high in our esteem. And when they maintain any doctrine without hesitation, we are disposed to judge favourably of the motives by which they are determined. On the other hand, apparent distrust and timidity in such men, excite similar sensations in those who view them as patterns of imitation. But he who betrays those passions without having gained the esteem that counteracts their influence, will be considered as a man who has no fixed principles; or as an impostor who is

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solicitous

folicitous to efcape examination. They therefore who favour the authors of our religion find their confidence heightened by the ingenuous fimlicity of their declarations, and by their encouragement of learning and of candid inquiry. And imbibing fome portion of their fpirit, they think of tenets without restraint or uncertainty, of whose truth the original authors appear invariably to be convinced. I do not fay that prejudices formed from this propensity are always juft and well grounded. I mention them only as being customary and natural.

Let us remark, however, that the friends of truth are the only perfons to whom this candid proceeding can be beneficial. Mean fubterfuges are the arts to which impoftors have ever had recourfe in propagating their fyftems. And confidering fcience which enlightens the underftanding as their worft enemy, they are anxiously folicitous to repress her exertions and to difcourage her refearch. Evidences by which this fact is confirmed beyond question will be produced in the fubfequent part of this fection.



These observations will assist us in determining the different qualities by which the man of the world, the philosopher, and the author of a new religious system ought to be distinguished. To the first an *apparent* diffidence and caution carried into his whole conduct will be hurtful rather than beneficial. For diffidence is often, although unjustly, supposed to indicate small intellectual merit, which the world rates according to the estimation of the owner. On the other hand we judge apparent reserve and caution to proceed from universal distrust, and from intentions which a man is afraid, or is ashamed to communicate. With a philosophical inquirer the case is different. A performance wherein such a man either comments upon an original, or is employed in some abstracted disquisition, ought to bear marks of that cautious diffidence which conciliates affection and regard. But in the last case neither of those qualities ought to characterise the author of a religious system; who if he speaks from assurance, must speak without diffidence, and to whom cautious reserve is unnecessary, because it is supposed that he acts from inspiration. From a teacher thus dignified men have reason to ex-

## §4 OF CHRISTIANITY AS THE SUBJECT

pect, that the doctrines which he promulgates for universal emolument, shall be submitted to universal cognisance and examination. He therefore who, while he recommends the attainment of knowledge, calls upon those who have acquired it to inquire into the nature of his pretensions, and to examine their evidence, must be considered as acting from conviction, that they will bear the strictest scrutiny without being injured. On the other hand, we cannot judge favourably of a scheme whereof the principles are partially communicated. And whether we view the author of those principles as being cautious, diffident, or disingenuous, his conduct must still be the object of censure. These remarks demand to be exemplified.

It was a well-known maxim of Pythagoras, that the great rules of his philosophy were to be preserved by his disciples from the knowledge of the vulgar \*. By rules or principles to be concealed, we are by no means to understand the whole scheme of this great philosopher; for of some parts of it we have

\* *Εν στεχυφοις ταυτα εχειν, και τοις μαθηταις και αμνηταις μη μεταδιδουαι.* Vide *Seld. de Diis Syriis.*

many excellent and comprehensive specimens†. The maxim above mentioned therefore most probably respected certain tenets that were known only to the followers of Pythagoras, and that characterised no other sect. This inference may be drawn from the terms in which the command is expressed. For it is from the *απαίδευτοι*, and *ἀμύνητοι*, the unlearned, and uninitiated, that these principles were to be concealed.

Let me suppose that you, my young reader, had lived in the age of Pythagoras, and that you had taken the liberty to inquire into the motives of his conduct. You would have asked him, in this case, for what reason he chose to render his discoveries useless to a great part of mankind by this rigid prohibition? and why he wished to avail himself of enigmatical ambiguity in explaining his principles, rather than to use the common vehicle of language? To these questions our philosopher would have replied, that to his own

† Vide ΔΙΟΓ. ΛΑΕΡΤ. ΠΥΘΑΓ. p. 578. 579. *ab Philostrati Vit. Apol. Tyan Lib. 1. c. 1. Lib. 3. c. 6. Lib. 6. c. 6. pass.* See likewise the treatises entitled ΠΥΘΑΓΟΡ. ΑΠΟΣΤΑΣ. in a valuable collection of ancient fragments entitled *Opuscula Mythologica, Ethica, et Physica*, Cantab. 1671.

followers he communicated his opinions in simple and plain words ; that to strangers and uninitiated persons he made use of enigmas, and of symbolical representations \*. And with respect to the vulgar, he would have told you, that the doctrines of his sublime philosophy exceeded their comprehension.

Let me suppose, that to all this you had made the following answer. “ These principles, permit me to say, appear to be narrow and illiberal. Your philosophy is of little use, if it has not taught you, that to promote the happiness of mankind ought to be the ultimate aim of your labours. And men, as being the common offspring of one parent, have a common right to be made acquainted with discoveries in which all are interested. You, Sir, are worshipped by your own disciples † ; and you are held in too much re-

\* This is a known distinction of the Pythagorean philosophers.

† Illud quoque inter Pythagoræ laudes numerant : quicquid ab eo jussu prolatumque esset, id tanquam legem ab ejus discipulis observari consuevisse ; quod in cunctis ita eum colerint, ac si ex *Jove genitus ortusque sit*. *Philostat. Vit. Appollon. c. 1. p. 2.*

verence to dread persecution or calumny from the promulgation of your opinions. With your philosophy, if it shall be rendered universally intelligible, your fame at the same time must spread universally. Prompted then by so many reasons to follow this course, by what motive have you been induced to reject it? By a secret apprehension, without doubt, that your philosophy is not calculated to bear a close examination. Like the monarchs of the east, you have therefore kept within the narrow precincts of your retirement, afraid that what the few adored as the dictates of a Divinity, the many would have discovered to be the dreams of a mortal."

To this cool speech our philosopher would have been somewhat puzzled to have framed an answer. Mark then the difference betwixt the timid diffidence of Pythagoras, and the explicit sincerity, the candid declarations of Christ, and of his Apostles! Let us observe likewise the circumstances in which such opposite modes of conduct were adopted. The philosopher, in a situation *perfectly secure*, obstructs the progress of science, by concealing some essential principles of his philosophy  
from

from mankind. On the contrary, the Author of our religion, and his followers, although furrounded by adversaries, and exposed to persecution, yet made known their doctrines to all men without reserve or abatement. Instead of obstructing knowledge, we have seen that they encouraged the acquisition of it both by precept and example. Finally; confident of the goodness of their cause, they appealed to reason improved by the closest philosophical investigation, as the judge of its evidence.

They who follow out this tract of observation, will reflect, that the hieroglyphical learning of Egypt favoured the concealment of principles, to which close inquiry might have been prejudicial. And although the present mode of instruction was not invented with this purpose, it was yet most probably preserved with this view, after the invention of alphabetical characters. The mystery of oracular imposition will likewise be considered by such men as having conduced powerfully to the same end. For although artfully veiled from the cognisance of men, yet this mean was employed during many ages with success

success to influence their actions. They will compare, in the last place, with the examples above mentioned, the conduct of the Mohammedan impostor, among whose followers the spirit of rational inquiry hath been repressed in all ages. And from those instances, collated with each other, they will mark the difference betwixt a practice that appears to have been dictated by distrust of certain doctrines, and that which arises from conviction of their falsehood. In the first case, they will observe, that the track of diffidence and of suspicion becomes perceptible as a path that deviates from the line of rectitude. In the other examples, they will trace the progress of the shade wherein this path is involved; and will remark, that, to those who go forward, it becomes familiar at the time that it increases in obscurity, and that they are at last compelled to take refuge in the total and impenetrable darkness that overspreads its extremity.

We have already observed, that the Author of our religion, shunning this darkness, invites all men to examine the nature of his doctrines, and the authority of his mission.

Let us farther reflect, that his apostles did not themselves embrace his doctrines without evidence\*, and that their example is recorded as a pattern of our imitation†. Let us remember concerning all taken together, that, far from concealing any Christian tenet, they published the truths that were most obnoxious, and that are least intelligible, with the same freedom as those that are clearest, and most obviously beneficial. From the facts thus placed together, it appears to follow incontestably, that the first Christian teachers were convinced of the truths which they made known to men; and that their conduct, regulated by this conviction, was opposite to that by which imposture in all its forms hath ever been characterised.

As therefore enlarged inquiry corresponds to the spirit of our religion, and to the practice of its authors, we cannot wonder, that the mind, when it was emancipated from su-

\* See particularly the account of the memorable conversation at Emaus. Luke xxiv. 25. to 33. and John xx. 27.

† 1 Cor. i. 23.



perstitious restraint, pushed its researches farther than it had originally proposed. Some account of this conduct is made in the preceding section, in which the influence of one cause hath been traced at some length. In fact, it is not more strange that men began to examine the evidence of revelation in an enlightened age, than it is that they acquiesced in this proof implicitly during a darker period. At the time of the reanimation of science, an inquiry of the present kind came naturally to be carried on. A few of the circumstances that conduced to this end, it may be proper to enumerate.

When we contemplate the laws and institutions of Christianity, one of the first objects that fixeth our attention is the severity of its moral precepts, which enjoin men to resist even the beginnings of evil. Prohibitions that oppose the indulgence of natural propensions, may be revered, from our dread of the authority that enjoins their observance. But while we yield to these a reluctant obedience, we consider them as laws that contract our sphere of enjoyment. A secret prepossession is therefore established against the

scheme or system of which those prohibitions make a part, which in fact is the desire of a mind that finds itself restrained, to be released from bondage. From a sensation of this kind, even the best men are by no means exempted at all times. For creatures in whose characters reason and passion meet together, must find that their actions as well as their sentiments are often influenced by the latter. It is therefore obvious, that a religion, by the laws of which those actions and sentiments are condemned, must be so far unacceptable, as it opposeth a principle of powerful and universal efficacy.

It will not be denied, that the commands relating to the suppression of resentment, the forgiveness of injuries, the resisting temptation, the subduing sensuality, the submitting to persecution, and many others that might be mentioned, excite dread and reluctance. Nor can we refuse, that those commands are more strongly and more particularly enforced in the sacred writings than in any other work with which we are acquainted. They, therefore, who submitted to certain restrictions merely from the belief that they were enjoined

ed by divine authority, were disposed to listen to men who professed to release them from this embarrassment, with that partiality wherewith he who pleads in behalf of a ruling passion will always be regarded.

Prompted then by the love of singularity, and encouraged by the hope of gaining favourable attention, the adversaries of Christianity began to consider by what means a religion so ill adapted to popular prejudices might be overthrown. In an age when philosophical disquisition came into some repute, the objections that were urged with this purpose were of two kinds. The first respected real events and circumstances, which the manner of relating, as well as their own nature, were supposed to render doubtful. And those of the second kind were founded upon passages, of which the import was rendered ambiguous or contradictory, by methods which shall be mentioned. Of the former kind were the events related in the prophetic language of the Old Testament, which language, however explicit when divested of its metaphorical veil, is yet rendered by this very circumstance peculiarly susceptible of  
misconstruction.

misconstruction. Of the same nature are the miracles recorded in the New Testament. He who wished to be thought incredulous respecting the wonderful and astonishing, affected to explode these, from plausible and popular motives. He considered them as deviations from the usual course of nature, which were said to have been wrought in a remote corner of the world, and were ascribed to a man who was distinguished by no pre-eminence of birth, nor by any advantage of education. Exceptions arising from those facts were proposed with much readiness, and were enforced by every art of subtle and plausible representation.

The doctrines, precepts, maxims, and points of faith, that are contained in the sacred writings, gave rise to objections of the last kind. The passages from which these are drawn, supposed to have been mutilated and perverted by individuals, were found to admit of very unfavourable expositions. And of this supposition ironical and sarcastic commentators failed not to take advantage. Such expositions were therefore framed, sometimes by detaching some passages from their natu-  
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ral connection, and at others by holding up as objects of ridicule, tenets that had formerly been misrepresented. Upon some occasions, it was perceived that this purpose might be gained by adhering to the literal meaning where the sense was couched in metaphor. And, finally, the lovers of novelty discovered, that portions of scripture thus misrepresented might be contrasted so as to be rendered apparently contradictory and absurd. Let us lay those circumstances together, and consider them as having co-operated, at the time of the resurrection of letters, with the great principle of the love of singularity. Upon this review, instead of viewing the course which men followed at that period as unfavourable to our religion, we should have wondered with more reason, if among the multitude of philosophical adventurers, no individual had been found who was daring enough to strike into so inviting a path.

Add to all this, that men were disgusted, when they began to think for themselves, with the spiritual despotism which the church of Rome had exercised for so many ages over the Christian world. They who, excluded

ded from access to the originals, were accustomed to receive as infallible truths the expositions of men, as soon as they regained their privilege, were ready to abuse the liberty that had been so long withheld from them. I do not hesitate to affirm, that the power which that church arrogated and exercised, and the principles which its members professed to teach as points of faith by *divine commission*, established prejudices of a very permanent nature in the minds of many persons against the supposed author of those principles, and the power with which he was invested. Every man knows, that, in cases of this kind, to be undeceived even in some material points, is not to gain complete satisfaction. When parties of opposite persuasions profess to derive their principles from the same general standard, mischief must always be the consequence, whatever side truth may take in the contest. For he who cannot decide from accurate investigation, will be led in the last resort to question the authenticity of originals, to which both make their reference.

An intelligent reader, it is presumed, will  
find

find an adequate reply in the preceding observations to the first question: Whence it was that men began to object to the general evidence of revelation, soon after they had emerged from the dark ages? It remains that we should inquire whether this fact is not unfavourable to Christianity, from the suspicion which it suggests that this religion is unfit to bear a scientific research.

Two methods of treating this question may be proposed; the direct, as we may term it, and the circumstantial or comparative. The direct method of proof is, to evince the truth that our religion is fitted to bear such an examination by an actual analysis of its forms and principles, which are considered as being adapted to enlighten the understanding, to enlarge the knowledge, and to correct or improve the manners of men. The proof, on the other hand, that is obtained by comparing the state of things under the Christian dispensation with the situation of the world in the ages that preceded it, is of the last kind. And although this method may not be so immediately conclusive as the former, yet equal satisfaction may arise from it upon reflection.

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I have adopted both methods of proof in the following observations, that the reader's view of it may be rendered more comprehensive.

Circumstances respecting the spirit and tendency of our religion have been brought together in the present section, which lead us to infer, that a scientific inquiry must be favourable to both, instead of being prejudicial. We have seen, that, as it is not the interest of impostors to encourage rational disquisition, it hath never been their practice to call this spirit into exercise. We have pointed out the signatures whereby an author's distrust of the truth of certain tenets, or his disbelief of these, may be discovered; the former, by inducing him to contract the sphere of investigation; and the latter, to repel at all times the spirit of inquiry. And from comparing both with the tendency of our religion, and with the conduct of its authors, we have drawn conclusions which the premises appear to justify.

An examination of the subjects that have been treated by those men, will indeed convince any rational inquirer, that their purpose



pose must have been to render the influence of science universal. In proof of this remark, the many objects are offered to view that relate to natural and civil history ; to philosophy in its most extensive sense ; to poetry, eloquence, morals ; wherewith it is acknowledged that those sacred volumes are replete. We shall endeavour to prove, that topics so various and interesting are treated with the general end of promoting the welfare and general happiness of mankind.

From this account it obviously follows, that the first objects to which a man of science will give attention in examining the Christian scheme, must be favourable to the plan itself, and to the character of its authors. To the former this must happen, from the variety and important nature of its subjects ; and to the latter, from the apparent candour and sincerity with which they deliver their sentiments. Those capital circumstances, therefore, support and strengthen each other ; and the evidence arising from both acquires force, as we have seen, from comparison.

But what has been the effect of this religion

gion upon the opinions, manners, and characters of mankind? By what means has it enlarged their knowledge, and in what respect has it contributed to promote civilization? Known facts we acknowledge to be decisive proofs in all cases in which they are urged with propriety. Speculative reasoning, on the contrary, loses its plausibility, as well as its force, when it is unsupported by experience. A large compass appears to be prescribed by those inquiries, which it is not our present purpose to go over particularly. A full reply would lead us to compare the notions of the Jewish people, respecting the nature and perfections of the Deity, with those which the most polished ancient nations gained on those subjects from the writings of their poets and philosophers. But the examination of this copious theme, whatever benefit Christianity might receive from it, would open a detail of too complicated a nature to be carried on particularly in this section.

I propose, therefore, as a direct answer to the preceding questions, to prove the following propositions. 1<sup>st</sup>, That the Christian religion

ligion is fitted more aptly than any other scheme to perfect the characters of men; because, to the advantage of containing the most complete moral system, it superadds that of exhibiting, in the conduct of its author, a perfect model of imitation. *2dly*, That the bounds of knowledge have been greatly enlarged by this religion; because truths of which philosophers failed to ascertain the reality, are determined by its teachers without embarrassment or ambiguity. *3dly*, I shall endeavour to evince, that the mild and temperate spirit of this religion hath contributed effectually to civilize and polish the manners of mankind. And, *4thly*, That a free examination of Christian doctrines and institutions hath served to rectify prejudices of the worst tendency, and to substitute in place of narrow and illiberal notions, enlarged views of the divine government and perfections. Let us consider these points successively as they fall to be investigated.

The general division of duties into the three classes of those which we owe to God as our common Parent, to our fellow-creatures as members of society, and to ourselves

as individuals, is a well-known distinction. I do not deny that many excellent rules respecting the regulation of practice in those capital departments are contained in the writings of ancient moralists. But that the scriptures contain rules on these subjects, and exhibit views of them, of more excellence than the former, will appear from a few observations on each class considered separately.

It cannot be denied that the great doctrine of the unity of God is a fundamental tenet of the Christian religion, which the sacred writers agree unalterably in maintaining. And we may remark, as one of the strongest proofs of its divine original, that, at the time when polytheism was the established religion of more powerful and polished nations, this truth was inculcated only by the Lawgiver of the Jews. “Know, said he, O Israel, that the Lord thy God is One GOD\*.” Reflection will convince us, that the duties which we owe to the Supreme Being acquire force and propriety from the sublime idea of him that is here exhibited. We contemplate

\* Deut. vi. 4.

this Being with peculiar reverence, when he is held forth as one simple and universal intelligence, to whom his creatures have recourse as to their common Father. The duties of filial love and gratitude flow naturally from this account of their author, to whom they are paid without hesitation or constraint. On the other hand, it is obvious that we cannot subdivide this great idea, and dissipate these affections among inferior divinities, without diminishing their force in a great measure, if we do not render them terms without significance. For to deities of whom each claims a share of our homage and thankfulness, we will offer those oblations less cordially and sincerely, as we conceive limits to be assigned to their power or their beneficence : Whereas these concentrate without reserve, according to the first hypothesis, in one complete and undivided original.

It is not my purpose to repeat in the present work the sentiments of authors who have written formerly on this important subject. Concerning the second class of duties, therefore, I shall only observe, that the sacred writers are more explicit and  
more

more particular than those above mentioned, upon every branch of duty that is connected with suffering. This circumstance does honour to the doctrines of our religion, and renders its moral system apparently more complete, and indeed useful, than any that is contained in the writings of philosophers. Sufferings, in the present state of things, fill up a large proportion even of the happiest life. Of this truth the authors of our religion were rendered sensible by experience. And foreseeing the state of the church in future ages, at the time when they were attentive to the general circumstances of mankind, they lay down rules that are accommodated equally to all situations. Hence ariseth the peculiar propriety wherewith they expatiate on the virtues which persecution calls into exercise. Hence is derived the precept of returning blessing for curses\*, Hence the command enjoining Christians to pardon†, and even to love their enemies‡; to do good offices to their persecutors§; to

\* Matt. v. 44. Luke vi. 28.

† Matt. vi. 12. Luke xi. 4.

‡ Luke vi. 27. 35.

§ Ibid. Matt. vi. 44.

fly from violence instead of resisting it\*; and in general to suffer with meekness, patience, and submission. It is obvious, that, setting aside the sacred character of Christ and of his Apostles, their injunctions acquire force and energy from the circumstances in which they were placed. When both therefore are taken under consideration, we cease to wonder at the mild and benevolent spirit by which these rules appear to have been dictated, as well as at the particularity with which they are applied.

Our observations on this subject may be extended with propriety to the more private duties that respect the individual. The body of man, when it is considered as framed of movements that are infinitely complicated, and as animated by the breath of this Divine Essence, acquires importance from our conception of its Architect. As a sanctuary therefore consecrated by this inhabitant, we are required to preserve it from pollution.

But it is not merely in the comprehensive nature of its morality, nor in the motives to

\* Matt. x. 23.

virtuous practice, that a scientific inquiry will display the excellence of our religion. It exhibits likewise, in the example of its authors, a pattern framed according to those maxims, and conformed to them in every circumstance. It is well known that this was by no means the case of ancient moralists. History offers Socrates indeed to our view as a singular instance of a man from whose mind the study of philosophy had eradicated propensities to vice. But among the Greeks, the licentious indulgence of the followers of Epicurus, among Roman philosophers, the lives of Sallust and of Seneca, not to mention others, debase this respectable designation. Of the latter particularly, actions that are discordant to every moral precept, will ever be considered as indications of the inadequate influence of his philosophy. We shall see immediately that this opposition of principle and practice, illustrated by so many examples, arose from the different opinions which those philosophers entertained concerning the chief good of man, or what ought principally to gain his attention. In the mean time a discerning reader will readily remark, that whatever



ever virtues are recommended by the Author of the Christian law, are likewise exemplified in their practice\*. The life of Jesus himself is a perfect pattern of all the excellencies that can adorn or exalt human nature, brought as it were into one view, and set before us as the model of our imitation.

It was observed, that this religion, to the precepts of which the lives of its teachers are so happily conformed, has contributed to extend the bounds of knowledge by the importance and variety of its discoveries. The present subject leads us to examine the truth of this proposition, which may be confirmed by very satisfying evidence. The first Christian teachers have effectuated the purpose above mentioned, by the two following methods. 1. They ascertain with precision, and with perfect uniformity, the nature of the chief good, concerning which philosophers wrangled to no purpose. 2. They reveal to mankind truths as being absolutely certain, of which some had formerly been unknown, and of others, a few only had framed some imperfect conception.

\* See the 11th chap. of the Epist. to the Hebrews *pass.*

The philosophers of antiquity exhibit an astonishing proof of the weakness and insufficiency of reason, in their various and contradictory theories respecting the chief good of man, or the object that constitutes his happiness. Let me suppose, that you, my young reader, had lived among those sages; and, solicitous to have this point determined, that you had addressed yourself to the father of the Stoical tribe in these terms :

“ I am going, Sir, to launch out into the  
 “ world of which I am yet ignorant. I wish  
 “ to pursue some fixed purpose with steady-  
 “ ness, and not to be deluded by evanescent  
 “ objects. I have a high opinion of your  
 “ abilities, experience, and knowledge. *What*  
 “ *is the chief good of man?*”—Zeno, rising from  
 his temperate meal of dried figs\*, would  
 have replied with much solemnity in words  
 of the following import:

“ Young man, know that the ΤΟ ΚΑΛΟΝ is  
 “ a term of comprehensive signification. It  
 “ relates to action as well as to external ele-  
 “ gance, and is constituted by that self-created

\* ΑΑΕΡ. ΖΗΝΩΝ.

“ excellence

“ excellence which confers dignity and im-  
 “ portance upon all other objects, but which  
 “ borrows those qualities from none\*. In  
 “ the perfection, therefore, of whatever is  
 “ just and honourable, you will find the  
 “ chief good of which you are in search †.”

Dissatisfied with this general and loose definition, you have recourse to Epicurus, whose account of the matter is indeed more appropriated and particular. He replies to your question, by introducing you to the Powers of sensual gratification, with whom you find him to be surrounded. “It is among those companions,” he will say, pointing to Ceres, Venus, Bacchus, and Pomona, “my young friend, that you will find the chief good which you desire to possess. It consists in the indulgence of sense, and of imagination. You will be a fool, if you shall seek

\* Εφ' ὃ, πάντα τα ἐν το βίῳ πραττομένα καθήκοντος αναφορὰν λαμβάνει αὐτοῦ δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν. *Stob. apud Lipsium Oper.* tom. 4 p. 473.

† Ἐν το κανόνι λέγει ὁ Ἐπικουρὸς κριτήρια τῆς ἀληθείας εἶναι τὰς αἰσθητικὰς καὶ προληπτικὰς, καὶ τὰ παθη. Οἱ δὲ Ἐπικουρεῖοι καὶ τὰς φανταστικὰς ἐπιβολὰς τῆς διανοητικῆς. ΛΑΕΡΤ. ΕΠΙΚΟΥΡ.

“ for it any where else.” From this society Hieronymus will draw you aside, and will forbid you to credit either of those gentlemen. “ Of all evils,” he will say to you, “ whether mental or corporeal, PAIN is the most insupportable. And you will therefore find the greatest good to consist in an exemption from this greatest of evils.” To sum up all, Carneades will explode all those hypotheses. “ To turn the gifts of nature,” he will say, “ to the best account, and to enjoy to the utmost the advantages derived from them, is to be happy. This doctrine,” he will add, “ I am ready to maintain against Zeno and all his followers \*.”

Unable to make a choice among so many various and contradictory theories, you turn from those professed masters of reason, to the

\* Cicero comprehends the various theories of those philosophers in one passage. “ Sunt autem hae de finibus, ut opinor, retentae defensionae sententiae : Primum simplice quatuor : Nihil bonum, nisi honestum, ut Stoici ; nihil bonum, nisi voluptatem, ut Epicurus ; nihil bonum, nisi vacuitatem doloris, ut Hieronymus ; nihil bonum, nisi naturae primis bonis aut omnibus, aut maximis frui, ut Carneades contra Stoicos disserebat.” *Tuscular. Quæst. Lib. 5.*

authors who, although less assuming than the former, are more consistent in their account of this matter. Among these we must observe, that a light is reflected upon all sides from two important principles which are established as the foundation of our religion. The first is, that there is in man an intelligent spirit, which, although associated with matter, is distinct from it, and independent. The second principle is, that this spirit will subsist through eternity, being naturally infrangible and immortal. To these propositions, when we add that respecting the reward and punishment which in this state will follow the performance of good or of bad actions, the question concerning the chief good will appear at once to be determined. For it will be concluded, that he whose hope of reward in that state is well founded, hath obtained this good, by having answered the end of his creation, of which others are in quest to no purpose.

It is in reasoning from those fundamental principles that the sacred writers are consistent and uniform in their declarations upon this subject. In the address of Jesus to Martha

tha and Mary, we find him representing the care of the soul as “the one thing needful \*.” To the same purpose, he commands his followers first to seek the kingdom of God, as an acquisition in which all others are included †. Look into the writings of his apostles. “Seek,” says one of them, “those things which are above ‡.” “Godliness,” says another, “is profitable to all things, having the promise both of the life that now is, and of that which is to come §.” “Moses,” says a third, exemplifying the general principle, “chose to suffer affliction with the people of God, &c. because he had respect unto the recompence of reward ||.”

From those observations it must be obvious, that the question relating to the chief good is inseparably connected with the belief of future existence. And the authors of our religion have taken the only sure method to determine this point effectually, by having observed this connection, and deduced the former doctrine as a corollary from the latter. The consistency therefore of those wri-

\* Luke x. 42.      † Matt. vi. 33.      ‡ Colos. iii. 1.

§ 1 Tim. iv. 8.      || Heb. xi. 25, 26.

ters, in their representation of the object that conduceth principally to happiness, is occasioned by their adherence to the doctrine of immortality, which they inculcate at all times without disagreement or reserve.

Here then two important questions are resolved in a satisfactory manner to the Christian, by which his knowledge is rendered comprehensive. And he who is not actuated by invincible prepossession, must acknowledge that their unanimous and steady adherence to the same principles, opposed to the contradictory theories of Pagan philosophers, establisheth a rational prepossession in their behalf.

That Christian institutions have tended as much to civilize, as they have done to instruct and to reform mankind, is a truth which some remarks on their nature and effects will render obvious. A full examination of this subject would lead us to enumerate the consequences of which the laws and ordinances of our religion have been productive in society. At present we may observe, in general, that the pacific spirit of the gospel,

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and the practice of that benevolence which it recommends and exemplifies, co-operate with its peculiar rites and ceremonies, to improve the manners of men, as much as to direct and to regulate their actions. I pass over the precepts enjoining us to be meek, submissive, temperate, dispassionate, forgiving. Of these the tendency is obvious; as is the effect of that brotherly love which was propagated by the author of our religion with so much attention, and is emphatically denominated “the bond of perfectness.” We cannot however avoid, upon the present occasion, to mark the design of the sacramental rite of the supper; a rite that was instituted with the noble purpose of rendering the virtues of its Author the objects of remembrance, and of imitation. By sitting down at one table, and by partaking of the same elements, we are taught to express our good will to each other. Our recollection of the example of Jesus, in this solemn action, is an incentive to the acquirement of excellencies by which the heart is purified. And by reflections whereof the scene represented by the sacred elements is naturally productive, we are prompted to exercise the duty of forgiveness.

But



But with whatever efficacy these rules may have operated to the emolument of society, they are far from being the only expedients which the Author of our religion employed towards the accomplishment of this salutary purpose. Among the characters that have distinguished society in its most enlightened state, the principle of universal toleration hath ever been deemed one of the most eminent. The spirits of men, in all ages, have been apt to rankle with peculiar animosity against each other, when irritated by the opposition of religious sentiment. And from the collision of discordant opinions on these subjects, sparks have been emitted, from which have arisen the most dangerous and destructive conflagrations. The history of mankind will render it obvious, that the desire of persecuting each other on account of an unavoidable difference of judgment in points of faith or of doctrine, contrary as it is to the first dictate of sober reason, yet of all others is the most difficult to be subdued. In nations the most civilized, and at times when the arts which soften the hearts, and which polish the manners of men, were successfully cultivated, we have seen this fatal desire breaking forth with

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violence.

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violence. And, in the pursuit of an unjustifiable end, we have observed it overleaping the barriers which reason and religion had planted to obstruct its career\*.

\* Is it necessary, reader, to recal to your memory upon this occasion the recent story of John Calas? You are not surely to be informed, that this man was made *the martyr of his religious principles*, not by a bigotted multitude, in an age of ignorance, or in an illiterate nation; but, in the eighteenth century, by the arret of a council, of which the members received their commission from a people, who, in their own estimation, are patterns of the arts by which human nature is adorned, and of the virtues by which it is dignified. I say, that this unhappy man was made *the martyr of his religious principles*. Of the alledged cause for which he suffered, the murder of his son, M. de Voltaire has proved by incontestible evidence that he was innocent. Need we mention his son Peter Calas, who was compelled by the threatening of being likewise broken upon the wheel, to abjure the Calvinist faith, and to profess himself a member of the church of Rome? The sufferings of this family in general persecuted, tortured, branded with infamy, driven from their habitations, and reduced to extreme indigence, are not mentioned merely as being evidences of the bigotry that prevails in a nation, which, in other respects, is justly entitled to esteem. These circumstances are only enumerated as being indications of the extreme difficulty with which a persecuting spirit is repressed even in the best informed age, and among men who have been improved by education.

It is well known, that the toleration of religious sects, of whatever denomination, is practised from political views among the most enlightened people of modern Europe. By them it is adopted as a mean to promote population, to extend commerce, and to encourage the cultivation of arts by which nations are benefited and adorned. It is likewise an advantage, to participate of which every peaceable member of the community hath a natural and unalienable right. This right, however, it hath been found no easy matter to ascertain during any age of the world. An universal acknowledgment of its validity, and a corresponding practice, we are apt to regard in any people as the surest tests of their progress in civilization.

From this view of things, when we come to consider the circumstances in which the Author of our religion was placed, and the tenets that were inculcated by him in those circumstances, a light is thrown upon his character, of which even his adversaries must feel the efficacy.

It is well known, that, by whatever degree  
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of theological knowledge the Jewish people were distinguished above other nations, they were yet deficient in the arts of civil government. And in general they were wanting in those acquirements that are derived from intercourse, and from experience. Defects of the latter kind were no doubt occasioned, in part, by the religious system of those people, so different from that of all other countries, and in part by that pride and contempt wherewith they beheld the rest of mankind. Passions of which the gratification is so contrary to the spirit of their religion, became gradually prevalent by indulgence. And by appearing conspicuously in their conduct at all times, signatures so remarkable came at last to be regarded as the most striking lineaments of their national character.

Of the passions above mentioned, the enemies of their religion became of all others most avowedly the objects. Amongst them likewise, those sects were peculiarly hated and reprobated, whose forms and institutions differing from their own in some circumstances, made the nearest approximation to these in others. Hence it happened, that, while a  
spirit

spirit of intolerant zeal animated the Jews against other nations, it was peculiarly directed against the little territory of Samaria, with whose inhabitants it was deemed infamous to hold correspondence.

At the time when Jesus was born this spirit appears to have been at its height. Even the disciples themselves seem in some instances to have been influenced by it, as we shall see immediately. To the prevalence of a zeal at the same time so pernicious, and so universal, *He alone* opposed doctrines that are calculated to subvert its dominion; and confirmed those doctrines by his example. With this noble purpose, among a people actuated by the unrelenting spirit of persecution, he proclaimed himself to be “the friend  
“ of publicans and sinners \*.” And that he might exemplify this declaration, he conversed familiarly with the “woman of Samaria ‡.” With the same view he emitted the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican †; prohibi-

\* Matt. xi. 19. Luke vii. 34.

‡ John iv. 7. to 27.

† Luke xviii. 10.

ted the use of the sword in religious contests ‡; and left peace as his last legacy to his followers ||.

But the most signal instance wherein this divine teacher displayed the true nature of his religion, was in the rebuke which he gave his disciples, who appear to have participated of the character and principles of the times. The inhabitants of a Samaritan village had refused his request to be received into one of their houses, “because his face was “as though he would go to Jerusalem.” His followers were justly incensed against those infidels. But in their demand of vengeance to be taken upon them, they betrayed the predominancy of that spirit in themselves, which they censured so warmly in their enemies. “Wilt thou, said they, command fire “to come down from heaven, and consume “them, as Elias did?” It ought to be remembered, that at this time Jesus was placed in circumstances the most forlorn and destitute. For, referring to his own situation, in a sub-

‡ Matt. xxvi. 52.

|| John xiv. 27.

frequent verſe, that of the foxes, and the birds of heaven, he declares “ that the ſon of man “ had not where to lay his head.” But attentive only to the end of his miſſion, “ he “ turned, it is ſaid, and rebuked them, and “ ſaid, ye know not what manner of ſpirit “ ye are of. For the ſon of man is not come “ to deſtroy men’s lives, but to ſave them \*.” This declaration would be injured by any comment.

From the whole it appears to be incontrovertably evident, that the author of our religion, born and educated among a people to whom all others were the objects of contempt and abhorrence; without viſible means of acquiring liberal ſentiment, adopted a principle that beſpeaks him to have poſſeſſed this quality. Unbiaſſed by the prejudices, and uninfluenced by the paſſions of his countrymen, we have proved, that he taught and practiſed a virtue in oppoſition to both, which nations the moſt highly poliſhed are moſt ambitious to imitate. Amidſt the night that ſurrounded him, the mild and tolerating

\* Luke ix. 56.

spirit of his religion shines forth with distinguished eminence, like the placid splendour of the star of evening, by which the hemisphere is at the same time adorned and irradiated. They therefore who shall not be convinced from our representation, that this teacher came from God on the most important errand, will at least be ready upon having considered it attentively, to adopt the exclamation of his own astonished although incredulous fellow-citizens.—“ Whence had “ this man his wisdom \* ?”

Our last observation on the present subject was, that Christianity has contributed principally to substitute enlarged views of the perfections of God, and of the order and œconomy of his government, in place of narrow and illiberal prejudices and opinions.

I do not think that it is necessary in proof of this remark, to view the sacred writings as sources whence philosophy at an early period collected the materials of her most profound disquisitions. Let us not grope in the

\* Matt. xv. 54.



dark for ambiguous evidence, when the history of later ages exhibits that which is clear, explicit, and appropriated. On this head I shall endeavour to prove and to illustrate the truth of the two following observations. The first respects the rapid proficiency which men made in all the departments of science, as soon as the scriptures were submitted to general examination. The second is, that to the examination above mentioned, this proficiency ought in a great measure to be ascribed. As the best evidence of this fact, I shall compare in certain striking circumstances the present state of nations in which the sacred volumes are read and examined universally, with that of countries wherein the common use of them is prohibited.

We remarked in a preceding section, that natural religion has received much benefit from the free inquiries that have been carried into the proof of Christianity, and into its various institutions. Of such inquiries conducted with candour and impartiality, the effect is, to produce as clear ideas of the divine perfections from the comparisons of sa-

cred and of profane explanation, as the human mind can acquire. The sentiments of philosophers on these subjects we regard as the judgment of able and experienced inquirers. The thoughts of the sacred writers are proposed to us, as those of men who are vested with a divine commission. By comparing therefore the ideas of the latter on this point with those of the former, and trying both at the same time by the standard of reason, our knowledge of God as he is related to his creatures becomes clearer and more particular than by any other method. We cannot likewise obtain a surer test by which to estimate the justice of pretensions to inspiration, than that which a comparison of the discoveries made by unenlightened reason, with those of an understanding that is divinely illuminated, will naturally suggest.

No member of the reformed churches needs be acquainted, that the scriptures were translated into the vernacular languages of various kingdoms, in consequence of the enfranchisement of those kingdoms from Papal dependence. And scarcely an individual  
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will receive new information from hearing, that the bible which he can read at his leisure, is concealed from the vulgar of Popish countries, by being published in a language that is intelligible only to the learned. What is the effect of this enfranchisement, and of those books being made universally known: The truths of natural religion are, as we have already seen, more generally understood. The doctrines of immortality, and of future retribution, no longer received as Christian tenets, merely from the affirmation of a bigoted and designing priesthood, are found to be fundamental principles of *this* religion. By these, all its precepts are enforced, and it is required that our belief of their reality should regulate our conduct.

Since the æra of the reformation, it is well known, that true science, as well as the elegant and ornamental arts, have been cultivated with greater success than during many preceding ages. Without entering into a detail on this subject, we need only to recollect the illustrious names to whom we are indebted in late ages for scientific discoveries; and to compare the manners of modern nations

tions with the rude customs of their ancestors at former periods ; to be satisfied concerning the rapid proficiency of the latter. The science of morals, improved by the lucubrations of a Bacon and of a Hutchison, the department of criticism occupied by a Scaliger, and a Lipsius, and a Beza, not to mention later authors of distinguished eminence : The sublime of poetry carried to its utmost height in the divine work of Milton ; composition appearing almost with faultless excellence in the elegant writings of an Addison, and a Hurd, a Sourin, a Fordyce, and a Blair rivalling the orators of Rome and of Athens, offer to view the productions of flourishing and of civilized nations.

But are the improvements that have been made in late ages, in the extensive departments above mentioned, to be ascribed to the influence of the sacred writings submitted to free examination ? I do not affirm this proposition in all its extent. It is indeed difficult to establish a criterion by which we can judge properly of this matter. The following reasons however will perhaps render it probable, that the effect of those writings  
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has been much more considerable than many readers may have believed. We may remark, 1st, That many marks of embarrassment and of ambiguity characterise the researches of unsupported reason, so far as these regard either religion or morals. And, 2d, Attention to the facts of history will convince us, that where the knowledge of this religion is most universal, the national character is most commonly expressive of its prevalence and effects.

To what hath been already said on the embarrassment of reason in her researches, let us here add the words of an author, who had surely no view to favour revelation. After having expatiated with much propriety on the feeble light that philosophy threw on the doctrine of immortality, he proceeds in the following words. “ We are sufficient-  
 “ ly acquainted with the eminent persons  
 “ who flourished in the age of Cicero, and  
 “ of the first Cæsars; with their actions,  
 “ their characters, and their motives, to be  
 “ assured that their conduct in this life was  
 “ never regulated by any serious conviction  
 “ of the rewards and punishments of a fu-  
 “ ture

“ ture state. At the bar, and in the senate of  
 “ Rome, the ablest orators were not apprehensive of giving offence to their hearers,  
 “ by exposing that doctrine as an idle and  
 “ extravagant opinion, which was rejected  
 “ with contempt by every man of a liberal  
 “ education and understanding \*.” Of modern  
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† *Gibbon's Hist.* vol. 1. p. 558. This doctrine of immortality is so essential a tenet of the Christian religion, that the omission of it, in an attempt to account for the progress of Christianity by natural means, would have been unpardonable. From this author's reflections on the imperfect knowledge of Pagans on this subject, we expect to be informed in his transition to that of Christians of the manner in which this important doctrine is explained and informed in the New Testament. Some account at least we hope to meet with of the explicit and consistent language of scripture upon this subject, in opposition to the ambiguous and variable declarations of philosophy. But no such matter. Mr G—— occupies very different ground. In his zeal for the cause of which he is an advocate, he loseth sight of the objects above mentioned. And he *presseth* into his argument prophecies that are supposed to relate to the end of the world, to the millennium, to the conflagration of Rome; and certain horrible denunciations of eternal damnation to all Pagans, as events which were infallibly to take place before the end of one century. “ The  
 “ careless polytheist, says he, assailed by new and unexpected terrors, against which neither his priests nor  
 “ philosophers

dern philosophers and orators, this disbelief of immortality cannot in general be affirmed with

“ philosophers could afford him any certain protection,  
 “ was very frequently terrified and subdued by the me-  
 “ nace of eternal tortures. His fears might assist the  
 “ progress of his faith,” &c. p. 565. 567. Such is this  
 author’s account of the scripture doctrine of immortality  
 considered as a cause of the propagation of our religion.  
 Let us pass over every other circumstance, and confine  
 ourselves to the view of this same cause as being ade-  
 quate to the effect that is here ascribed to it. In my  
 opinion Mr G—— hath made rather an unfortunate  
 choice in the present instance. For, granting all that he  
 hath said concerning the accomplishment of these predic-  
 tions to be true, I undertake to prove, that the pro-  
 gress of Christianity must have been powerfully obstruc-  
 ted by what our author denominates a mean of its pro-  
 pagation. From his own concessions likewise, how in-  
 consistent soever, I shall evince, that neither in one case  
 nor other was the operation of this cause universal.

In proof of the former proposition we need only to  
 reflect, that the prophecies relating to the end of the  
 world would have been mere temporary expedients for  
 the purpose of propagating the Christian faith, which  
 must have proved destructive to it at the end of one ge-  
 neration. For at this period, the indignation excited in  
 all orders of men by the apparent falsehood of those  
 prophecies, would have been proportioned to the faith  
 that had been placed in their accomplishment. Let us  
 grant, therefore, that the terror of an eternal punish-  
 ment to commence so soon had driven a timorous flock

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with strict truth. Among them there are many who adhere to this doctrine at the time

to take shelter within the fold of Christianity. Yet surely these would have reoccupied their ancient pastures, as soon as they discovered this to be a false alarm. To have raised, therefore, such an apprehension without cause, would have been to adopt a temporary expedient for filling the fold at the hazard of seeing it finally desolated. It is therefore evident that so far as credit was given to this interpretation of the prophecies, the cause of religion must have been injured by it essentially, instead of being promoted. I say, that this cause was injured by the explanation above mentioned *so far as it gained belief*. Luckily, however, by our author's own account of the matter, neither the good nor bad effect of such explanation could have been universal. For, with a similar inconsistency to that which was formerly mentioned, he says in another place, that, "as the prophecies of the conflagration *provoked* those Pagans whom they did not convert, they were mentioned with caution and reserve; and the montanists were censured for disclosing too freely the *dangerous SECRET*." Indeed! The SECRET must no doubt have been a dangerous one if it produced all the consequences which this Gentleman ascribes to it. But you will find, my young reader, some difficulty in believing that the Pagan nations were converted by a mean that was professedly made a secret. Of this new instrument of conversion provided at the same time with a repelling and with an attractive quality, we may pronounce, that the influence must have been much circumscribed from the

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time when they profess to reject Christianity. And there is not a national assembly in any part of the Christian world in which men would be permitted to treat this tenet with contempt.

To what cause ought this difference betwixt Pagan and Christian orators and philosophers to be ascribed? Try this matter by what standard you will, you must resolve it finally into the superior influence of Christi-

the reserve and caution with which it was applied. While we attribute therefore to this author the honour of having invented so useful an implement, we cannot vindicate him from the charge of inconsistency for supposing that permanent effects of any kind can arise from a cause endowed with repugnant and contradictory powers. And, in the present instance, the charge acquires force from his affirmation, that the rapid and public advancement of Christianity was brought about by a mean of which the tendency was to provoke and to terrify, and whereof the knowledge was imparted only to a few. At any rate, he who shall believe in the efficacy of this expedient to propagate a religion, ought not to bring the charge of credulity against Christians' who believe in miracles. For certainly, he would perform the greatest of all miracles who should convert multitudes by arguments with which they were not made acquainted.

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an principles, to Pagan philosophy. You must acknowledge that those have produced an effect, to the accomplishment of which, this in the highest state of improvement has been found ineffectual.

Our remarks on this subject will be enforced, when we inquire what have been the effects of this religion, respecting the character and manners of nations in which it is established. An examination of this point will discover, to an attentive observer, that those principles, and that conduct which bespeak advanced civilization, characterise the nations of modern Europe more or less particularly, according to the information which their inhabitants have acquired of the doctrines of revelation.

Let us, with this object in view, compare some principal European nations with each other. And the reader will derive particular effects from that cause which he may judge to be most adequate and appropriated. We shall select with this purpose from the monarchies of Europe, those of Spain, Portugal, France, and Great Britain, as being  
nations

nations whose character has ever been impressed by the influence of religion. It is well known, that, in the two former kingdoms, the monarchs and the priesthood have watched over the people during many ages with a jealous attention : Of their solitudes the effect has been, that the religious knowledge of the people is confined within the limits which their governors have prescribed to it. Not only are the inhabitants of this extensive continent barred from access to the sacred volumes ; but by the establishment of the tribunal of inquisition, they have been deprived of the means of information. What has been the effect of this conduct upon the national character of these people, and upon their practice at all times ?—Let the fields of Peru, desolated by the rage of the barbarous Pizarro ; let the cities of Flanders laid waste by the butcheries of Alva ; let the cruelties that were practised at Goa by the Portuguese ; in short, let the transactions at an *auto de fe* suggest the reply to this question.

From the religious principles of those nations, when we come to consider the state of the arts and sciences which men are at liberty

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ty to cultivate, they who maintain that these are wholly independent of the former, will find nothing that may justify their opinion. It is invidious and disagreeable to carry on a comparison of this kind, those cases only excepted in which the subject renders it necessary. At present, we must observe, that, with the freedom of inquiry into points of religion, the inhabitants of this region appear to have lost the power of conducting scientific research. From the indolence of an ill-informed priesthood, who read the sacred writings without understanding, on one hand ; and from the gross ignorance of the multitude, who are ready to swallow any absurdity, upon the other ; from these causes have arisen that stagnation of intellect, that torpid state of tranquil and inanimated languor, by which they have been distinguished for so many ages. Genius, like a plant that is preserved with difficulty in an uncultivated soil, languisheth in the gloom of Salamanca and Coimbra. Throwing out likewise, in a situation so unfavourable, wild and luxuriant shoots, instead of healthy and vigorous productions, after a few ineffectual efforts to preserve existence, she sinks unobserved into oblivion.

In France, we must no doubt acknowledge that the constitution of the Gallican church, founded upon liberal principles, and released from Papal subjection, is more favourable than those above mentioned to the propagation of science. An eulogy upon the acquired knowledge of this people in every elegant and ornamental art, in every happy and attractive accomplishment, would be superfluous and unnecessary. It ought, however, to be remarked, that to the ignorance of genuine Christianity that obtains in general among the middle and lower orders of men in this kingdom, and which the tendency of the established religion is to maintain, certain intolerant and many superstitious practices are to be ascribed. Even the greatest characters have been stained by practices of the present kind. And it is not easy to deduce this mode of conduct from any other cause than that to which we have ascribed it. The revocation of the edict of Nantz was the deed of the most august monarch of his age, who was however as much distinguished by his bigotry, as by his external splendour and munificence. On the other hand, the persecution of the family of Calas in the present age

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was the act of the supreme court of the province of Languedoc. The members of this court were undoubtedly men of some rank in that country. To what causes can we impute the actions above mentioned in both instances, but to an education ill-conducted, and to an incapacity of those who violated the laws of our religion, to judge for themselves concerning their nature and design?

Cast your eyes now, reader, upon those European nations in which the distinguishing doctrines of Scripture are generally known, as these books are translated into the vernacular languages. Among them I select Great Britain particularly, because it is not more the land of civil, than it is of religious liberty. At the same time, when we view it as a monarchy, of which the parts are more closely cemented than those of a republic consisting of distinct and independent provinces, the effect of this liberty is peculiarly conspicuous. Every reader must know, that persecution and intolerant zeal have ever prevailed in those kingdoms with the establishment of Popery. The reformed churches, on the contrary, have adopted an opposite conduct

conduct, as being conformed to the spirit of the gospel. The facts that confirm this observation are so well known, as to render an enlargement unnecessary. He who would have any particular event brought to his remembrance, may reflect upon the transactions that were immediately subsequent to the burning of London, and upon those that followed after the information of Oates and Bedloe. The spirit of retaliation was subdued at this time, as it had been at former periods, as being contrary to that of Christianity. A few leaders of the party were the only sacrifices which popular frenzy excited to the height by every successful expedient, received or demanded. But of the commotions to which less powerful causes gave rise on the continent of Europe, and among people who were in general unacquainted with the spirit of our religion, commotions which depopulated kingdoms, the history of this monarchy, from the age of its reformation, exhibits no instance.

The question now recurs. To what cause ought we to ascribe effects that have here been placed together in one point of view?

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Judge,

Judge, reader, for yourself in this matter. I have entered into this detail to prove, that the influence of Christian principles as well upon the conduct of men as upon the progress of science, has been much more considerable than we are apt at first view to conceive. It is not however my present purpose to decide positively on the subject. Some incontestible facts I have endeavoured to place before you. Let those who have leisure and ability to enter into the inferences that arise from our review, judge concerning it from examination.

We have now taken a large compass in answering the questions that were proposed in the beginning of this section. Let us pause a little before we bring it to a conclusion, and examine the objects that have successively been presented. Among young persons who wish to gain knowledge, Christianity is not injured by any expedient more effectually, than by being represented as a religion unfit to bear investigation, and adapted to vulgar understandings only. It is with this purpose, as we shall see afterwards, that the advocates of infidelity oppose the  
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FAITH of the Christian to the rational evidence of the philosopher. It is likewise with this view, that the resurrection of letters is mentioned as having been fatal to the interest of this religion. For men who were attached to it during the reign of superstition and ignorance, are said by its adversaries to have become sensible of their error, as soon as they were able to think and act with impartiality.

In order to take off the force of this plausible representation, I have examined it in its utmost extent. The last part of this objection respects the time when Deism is said to have originated with the spirit of free and rational disquisition. In answer to this, I have shown that the sacred writers, following an opposite course to that which impostors have ever pursued, give scope to this disquisition in its greatest latitude. At the time above mentioned, certain peculiar circumstances led to an inquiry into the general evidence of revelation. These circumstances I have endeavoured to bring together, and to place in a point of view which accounts most naturally for the effect which they are said to have produced.

But it is to the former part of the objection, respecting the tendency of Christian doctrines and institutions, that an answer is particularly necessary. For Christianity, as being the religion of the vulgar, is placed surely in the most unfavourable light. And what opinion soever *philosophers* may entertain concerning it, yet pretenders to this designation, who are more numerous than the former, will reject a religion thus marked, without hesitation.

With the purpose of removing this cause of modern infidelity, I have selected the general objects upon which an intelligent inquirer into this subject will place his attention principally. Having thus paved the way to the principal point, I have attempted to evince the universality, as well as the important nature, of effects that have arisen from Christianity, by the two following methods. The first is, a comparison of some essential parts of the Christian scheme with the plans and opinions of Pagan philosophers on the same subjects. The reader will decide without difficulty concerning points, of which evidence is brought from writers on both  
sides,

sides, and is placed before him with impartiality. In following out the last method of proof, I have considered Christianity as a mean employed to enlighten the understanding, to regulate the conduct, and to improve the manners of mankind. If it has been proved that men have derived essential emolument from this religion in those capital circumstances, its excellence and utility must be evident beyond question. In this case, it will be clear, that Christianity must receive benefit from an inquiry conducted upon scientific principles, and that the influence of true science is most general and conspicuous in those regions in which Christian doctrines and institutions are best understood.

## SECTION IV.

### *General Remarks on the imitative Propensity.*

**M**ANY subjects of importance, you, my young readers, have examined with little advantage, from the neglect of just and comprehensive arrangement in their treatment and application. Loose observations, although

although conceived and expressed with mastery, while they impress memory in some instances, yet fail at last of producing that permanent conviction of which arguments or remarks following each other in a regular series, and tending to illustrate a general proposition, are finally productive. I throw out these thoughts in the present case, as an apology to those of my readers who love the dishabille of composition, spirited fallies, and specious declamation, for endeavouring to treat the subject with a precision which it seems to demand.

Of the causes of modern infidelity, the love of imitation is one, of the most general efficacy. That its influence in accomplishing this end may be ascertained more accurately, I shall make some remarks on the power and universality of this great principle, considered as a rule of action. From this examination, the manner in which it operates to the prejudice of revealed religion will be more clearly comprehended.

You view the imitative propensity as *a rule of action*. Whence, it will be asked, is derived  
its

its effect? I answer, from the paucity of original characters, and from the striking figures or impressions by which those characters are discriminated. Nature appears to have been peculiarly sparing in her distribution of qualities that distinguish the maker or inventor in every profession from the imitator of his excellence. There is in every mind an early bias or propension towards certain manners and modes of deportment, on account of attractions that are often imaginary, and which cannot fully be described. They, to whom these manners are natural, become patterns of imitation. And the inferior order of men contemplate them with the same attention which a painter employs in copying an original. Neither is this desire to imitate confined wholly to the above mentioned circumstances. Observe mankind attentively. You will discover that this universal law pervades every department of life, and that it distinguisheth men from each other, as being divided into the classes that have been enumerated. Consider the subjects of speculation. The philosopher, the historian, the poet, the orator, will all mention with reverence the great masters of their several professions,

professions, whatever they may say of one another. The works of those men they will acknowledge to be the standards of excellence, and their characteristical qualities archetypes to be admired and imitated. Examine, on the other hand, the actions of men, either as history or as experience represents them. Is it not a truth universally known, that the few who were able to think and to act for themselves, have in all ages been leaders of the many? In the senate, the field, and even in the more ordinary occupations of life, the desire of the latter to be assimilated to the former hath produced effects which the most careless inquirer cannot fail to have remarked.

We must not conceive, that he who stands lowest in this great scale, ascending from the meanest to the most exalted minds, selects always the most faultless model in his own particular line, as that by which he is to frame his character. He makes choice perhaps at first of a copy which it is least difficult to imitate. Or, having placed his thoughts steadily upon one object, he slides insensibly into imitation, without perceiving what he is about.

about. We err in judging, that, when one man appears to imitate the address, the sentiments, or the actions of another, he falls into this practice always *with design*. The native pride of the human heart prevents the man even from feeling the motive by which he is influenced at those times. "I do not," he will say, "adopt the opinions of such a person, because these are *his* opinions, but because they are consonant to the dictates of my reason."

In this manner a species of self-imposition is carried on, of which the man is not sensible. Habit in the mean time ingrafts certain modes upon his character. He succeeds in acquiring similitude of manners, and of principles, to him whom he wisheth to resemble. But, failing to establish at the same time a corresponding similitude of understanding, he copies, along with some expressive features of his original, its imperfections and blemishes. And he becomes singularly an object of ridicule, by having these, without the excellencies by which they are compensated in the first instance, superadded to his own.

Our remarks on this subject ought not to be considered as respecting those men only who are inferior to others in mental or in external endowments. Its power and efficacy are in fact so great, as that they have overcome the efforts even of the most discerning and intelligent. Let two men be engaged in discussing a question, with which a third, who is a hearer, is not thoroughly acquainted. This man, how penetrating soever, will find it difficult to preserve his judgment unbiassed by his esteem of one of the parties. Setting aside the specious colouring which a man of superior talents may throw over false or exceptionable tenets, we conceive a favourable prepossession of these that is irrational, in consequence of having adopted a general opinion that may be well founded. We frame therefore a wrong judgment, without perceiving our mistake, by indulging a partiality wherein reason has not been consulted. Certain adventitious circumstances, of which we do not perceive the effects, concur in preventing us from judging equitably in such circumstances. Of this kind are, a certain confident mode of affirmation, the readiness and elocution of the speaker, his apparent knowledge



ledge of his subject, and other incidental advantages that produce the desire of imitation.

Are these the sole causes that produce this desire? By no means. The subject of debate enters likewise into your consideration at some times ; and contributes powerfully, although not always from just principles to excite this propension. Let us suppose, that two men whom you esteem equally, are engaged in disputation. You become then particularly attentive to the point of controversy. Confess now, my young readers : Are you not partial towards him of the two whose sentiments are apparently enlarged, and whose descriptions are splendid and decorated? And are you not ready to receive both as being well founded, without entering into too nice an examination of evidence? From a partiality thus acquired, the step is easy to imitation. So soon as attachment is added to esteem, he in whom both concentrate, is the model to which you wish to be conformed. In this case, your love of imitation takes a direction which various motives concur in prescribing to it, and your estimation

T 2

estimation of a character is heightened by circumstances which ought to have produced an opposite effect.

Our observations on the great principle of imitation have not regarded it according to the Aristotelian theory, as the parent of arts that derive from it the designation *imitative* \*. We have considered it as a leading motive by which conduct is influenced. And we now proceed in following out these remarks, to view this propensity when improperly directed, as having been employed successfully to promote the cause of infidelity. In this point of view, we must consider the subject as being of peculiar and principal importance. For, with whatever seeming indifference the mind may contemplate the objects which our religion holds up to it, yet these cannot be of real inefficacy in its estimation. The existence and perfections of a Being under whom we feel ourselves to be dependent, our horror of annihilation, which is not removed by the disquisition of philosophy; our anxious and rational curiosity to

\* ΑΡΙΣΤΟΤ. Ποιητικ. κ. δ.

be acquainted with the rewards of virtuous conduct ; its nature, excellence, extent, and duration ; those are subjects of which each comes home “ to mens business and bosoms.”

*Æque pauperibus prodest, locupletibus æque ;  
Æque, neglectum, pueris senibusque nocebit.*

That the judgment of men should be warped and misled in its estimation of such evidence, by circumstances which are in themselves frivolous, is a fact that does no honour to the human intellect. Our present business however is to confirm it by enumerating effects, which our remarks on the love of imitation will evince to be derived from this original.

It is obvious from what hath been said on this subject, that the propensity to copy the manners of men whom we esteem, and the desire of adopting their opinions, are effects that in many instances have the same common origin. Keeping this point therefore in view, in the application of our theory to religious questions, we will be enabled to discern the means by which this powerful propensity

penfity is rendered prejudicial, and the extent of its efficacy. For, it must be evident, that the same specious arts by which the opinions of men are influenced, and their conduct directed in other cases, will be successful likewise in the present. We have proved, by an appeal to sense, that in common cases young persons particularly, are prepossessed in favour of him whose views are seemingly enlarged, and whose promises or descriptions are specious and attractive. When from such cases, therefore, we come to consider laws or rules of conduct, it is plain, that he will be favoured most highly, by whose scheme passion and appetite are laid under the fewest restraints. An unlimited indulgence of sensual gratification, opens so fair a prospect of present happiness to the eye of inexperience, that nothing but the approbation of reason is wanting, that it may be carried effectually into execution.

In opposition to the moral precepts of the gospel, it will be acknowledged, that its adversaries had here an opportunity of inculcating principles of which the effect is universal. In what manner then have they  
availed

availed themselves of those advantages, so as to render the imitative propensity unfavourable to the religious principle in general, and more immediately to the tenets of Christianity? The causes that contribute to this end, are principally the following. 1. The enlarged and easy notions which certain philosophers entertain of important subjects, opposed to the seemingly narrow, gloomy, and superstitious views and practices of their adversaries. 2. Their professed contempt of credulity, and their boast of bringing every proposition to the test of philosophical evidence. 3. Their occupations in life which denominate them men of the world who think for themselves, contrasted with the circumstances and views of their professional antagonists. 4. Certain bold affirmations of being in the right, which impose upon those men whom inattention, prejudice, or weakness, disqualify to enter much into the question. By the concurrence of those causes, the freethinkers of the present, and of former ages, have gained an estimation to which the prevalence of their opinions is in a great measure owing.

The

The plausible representations, appeals, promises, and spirited descriptions by which this purpose is gained, lie scattered through the volumes of sceptical and deistical authors. And the influence of these is more dangerous as it is more imperceptibly insinuated. The cause of our religion may therefore receive benefit from an attempt, if it shall be properly carried on, to place those means of obstructing its efficacy in the open light, and to efface the colours with which they are embellished. With this end in view, and with a purpose of exposing to my young readers the futility of pleas that are artfully recommended to their attention, I throw together the following observations on the important subjects that have been enumerated.

## S E C T. V.

*Opposition of Natural and of Revealed Religion. Of pretensions to free and enlarged Sentiments.*

THEY who have studied the human heart with attention, cannot fail to have remarked that strong and natural prepossession which it receives in behalf of what-  
ever

ever is apparently candid, honest, and liberal. This noble principle, when properly regulated, is productive of the best, and when misapplied, of the worst and most dangerous effects. In the former case it demands high approbation, as the parent of sincerity, generosity, and freedom. In the latter instance, on the contrary, this prepossession gives occasion to a bias of the worst tendency against institutions which are of general emolument. Of this prejudice, established modes of worship, and principles of belief are sometimes rendered the objects. This happens when the modes and principles above mentioned are represented as tending to circumscribe exertions that ought to be unlimited, and to repel by fear our natural desire of investigating truth. From the consideration of such fixed laws and requisitions as restraints upon the natural rights of mankind, our predilection of whatever is bold and arduous appears to be derived. He who attacks the religious tenets of a community is deemed to be the advocate of freedom. And in this character we are disposed to regard him with a favourable partiality at his first setting out.

It ought to be observed, that although this partiality extends to all attempts that are daring and difficult, yet its operation is peculiarly conspicuous in the sphere of religion. Two causes may be assigned as having produced this phenomenon. The first is, that we consider him who stems the tide of popular opinion on subjects of a high and dangerous nature, which at the same time are generally known, and are universally interesting, as superadding to an ingenuity that claims our esteem, and fortitude, that excites admiration. The second reason is, that from the conviction which we suppose this man to have, that the promulgation of his doctrine, if false, must be prejudicial to society, as well as offensive to its supreme legislator, we are induced to judge favourably concerning his ultimate purpose. For we conclude, with some appearance of reason, that he whom such formidable motives have not deterred from taking the field, must be deeply sensible of the strength of his cause. And from this persuasion we transfer to his arguments some part of the prepossession that is impressed upon our minds in behalf of his sincerity.



To these considerations we may subjoin another, that in the present instance is equally efficacious ; I mean, the nature of those laws or institutions of which it is proposed to weaken or to subvert the authority. So powerful a principle is the love of freedom in its most general acceptation, that we recoil at the injunction of giving strict obedience to certain precepts, even at the time when we acknowledge their propriety. The mind rejects so naturally the idea of command. Every man knows, that his assent to the excellence of a general law is seldom so well founded, as to reconcile him in particular cases to the power by which it is carried into execution. Neither does our discontent upon these occasions, always arise from motives of personal interest. It is excited wholly by the authoritative mandate that enjoins implicit and unconditional obedience.

If this then is the case respecting rules which we approve, what shall we say of precepts against which, enforced as they are by awful sanctions, and directed to be strictly carried into execution, the passions of human nature powerfully and unanimously reclaim ?

When an artful adversary, taking advantage of the zealous labour of some well meaning expositor, in whose comment the yoke of restriction is rendered insupportable, exposeth its passive bearers to ridicule, and placing in opposition a plan that is apparently noble, enlarged, beneficent : When he employs at one time every plausible art to render the latter an object of rational approbation, and the former, of aversion and contempt; it is easy to see that he must conciliate esteem by these means, and establish prepossession. The application of these remarks to the present subject is obvious. We shall evince, in the subsequent part of this section, that the advocates of infidelity employ all these arts to accomplish their purpose.

Christianity, when it is viewed in some lights, presents an object of equal importance to the man who would work upon the principle of imitation, as to him who is actuated by the love of singularity. The man of ambition triumphs in idea over the multitude of inferior beings, who are unable by any strenuous effort to shake off the fetters of superstition. He enjoys likewise a high gratification

fication in the thought of pulling down the religion of so many powerful and opulent kingdoms. The advocate of free opinions, armed with the profession of asserting the natural rights of mankind, holds himself up as a pattern of imitation, on account of a noble expansion of thought, an exemption from vulgar prejudices and errors. He substitutes therefore unbounded liberty in place of modes and ceremonies, and of positive institutions. In the same manner, he who wisheth to set an example of the bold and arduous, can effectuate his end by no method more properly, than by subverting a religion which is said to bear the signatures of divinity. And all will receive encouragement from the favourable notion which we conceive of the sincerity of men who engage in such an enterprise. It is obvious from this application of Christian principles to our remarks on the circumstances that are favourable to an adversary, that these correspond perfectly to each other. He therefore who takes the side of infidelity in the contest, possesseth powerful means to ascertain the success of his attempt.

It is now time to consider the purpose to which our modern freethinkers have applied motives of such powerful and of such dangerous efficacy as those that have been enumerated.

You will observe, my young reader, from perusing the most approved performances of those writers, that they take two methods to recommend themselves as the patrons of free and of enlarged inquiry. And of these each is artfully calculated to produce the intended effect. The first consists of bold and plausible declamation on the excellence of their own scheme, placed in the most favourable light by an opposition to others of which the worst side is exhibited. The second, by which their purpose is more immediately accomplished, lies in the dextrous application of *the way of raillery* or of ridicule to certain obsolete and unfashionable doctrines. By the use of this mean, they conceive, that, in the balance of public estimation, they transfer into their own scale the weight which is taken from that of their opponents. Some illustrations of both kinds, drawn from their writings, will exemplify our observations.

One

One practice of the first kind, in the use of which deistical writers concur unanimously, is, to extol the religion of nature, and to oppose its easy, chearful, and animating spirit to those precepts of Christianity that may be rendered the most gloomy and terrifying. This law of nature, in the judgment of one of their most celebrated casuists, is happily stated in the middle, betwixt the comfortless prospect of the Atheist, the perpetual anxiety of the superstitious, the wild perturbation of the enthusiast, and pernicious fury of the bigot \*. He proposeth, by the salutary application of this law, to deliver mankind from the “*panic fears* †” that distract the Christian in his meditation. There is indeed no end to this author’s encomium on his law of nature, and on himself for having discovered its wonderful efficacy. “It is,” he will tell you, “absolutely perfect, incapable of addition or diminution ‡.” It comprehends every thing that tends to the honour of God, or the good of mankind ||. With so many other advantages, it possesseth that likewise

\* *Christ. as old as the Creat. p. 76.*

† *Id. p. 125,*

‡ *P. 3.*

|| *P. 70.*

of being levelled to the meanest capacities. No well meaning Gentile could be ignorant of it, nor is any great share of wisdom necessary to know it §.

Your expectation is raised by this magnificent apparatus, to be informed what this law or religion of nature is, and by what means you may act according to its dictates. To the first question our author will answer, that this law is “the sense and practice of those duties which result from the knowledge we, by our reason, have of God, and his perfections, and of ourselves and our own imperfections, and of the relations we stand in to him and to our fellow creatures\*.” To the second question he will answer, “That whatever circumstances men are placed in by the universal cause, it is his eternal and immutable will, by placing them in these circumstances, that they may act as these require †.”

This

§ *Christ. as old as the Creat. p. 295. 398.*

\* *Id. p. 14.*

† Patet, quæ Supremum Numen agnoscit, cultum ejus jubet, vitæ sanctitatem præcipit, penitentiam sce-

This author's high panegyric on the law or religion of nature is of the same kind with the eulogy which a writer, who on many accounts is justly respectable, bestows on certain *notitiae communes*, common signatures, or indications that are impressed upon all minds indiscriminately. By these a Catholic and universal church is constituted according to his estimation. "God (says he) has "impressed upon the minds of men in all "ages the knowledge of his existence, and "of his unity; a belief that He ought "to be worshipped; the principle which pre- "scribes holiness of life; a conviction of the "necessity and efficacy of repentance; and, "finally, the persuasion that there is a fu- "ture state of reward and of punishment." It is by an intuitive perception of those tenets that the noble author supposeth a church to be framed, that consists not of any single society, but of the whole human race. "In

rum indicit, et præmium vel pœnam post hanc vitam denunciat, esse a Deo profectas, et in nobis descriptas notitias communes: quæ vero plures Deos configit, &c. neque notitias communes, neque veritates habendas esse. *Herbert de Veritate*, p. 220. 221.

“ this truly Catholic, this truly universal  
 “ church (says he) all space and all number  
 “ are comprehended. By the knowledge of  
 “ these self-evident truths it is that we ac-  
 “ quire just notions of the providence of  
 “ God, and of the wisdom of nature. By  
 “ them alone we are taught to invoke the  
 “ common Father of his creatures as the first  
 “ and best of beings. To this great assembly,  
 “ therefore, comprehending members thus  
 “ indissolubly united, all the encomiums are  
 “ due that have been appropriated to any  
 “ *particular church*. And we have shown  
 “ that the last mentioned must be subject to  
 “ errors proportionally, as it recedes from  
 “ maxims thus characteristical and univer-  
 “ sal\*.”

We might add the suffrage of many au-

\* Ecclesia sola catholica, sola *μνοειδης* est notitiarum  
 communium doctrina, omne spatium, omnem numerum  
 complens : hæc sola enim providentiam divinam univer-  
 salem, sive naturæ sapientiam pandit. Hæc sola ratio-  
 nem unde Pater communis invocatur D. O. M. exponit.  
 Quæ igitur particulari unicuique ecclesiæ attexuntur en-  
 comia ; huic conveniunt, a qua quæ maxime recesserit  
 maxime errori obnoxium esse supra docuimus. *Hobb. de*  
*Veritate*, p. 222.

thors



thors to a scheme of religion, that is seemingly so sublime and comprehensive. But as I wish not to fatigue the reader with many passages of one import, I shall lay before him the plan of conduct which those gentlemen recommend as the most rational and consonant to their principles.

Of the authors who have been mentioned upon the present occasion, we have already seen that the former emancipates his pupils at once from every slavish and superstitious restraint, by declaring that “the immutable will of God permits every man to act as circumstances require.” By this notable rule the man himself is constituted the judge of what circumstances may require from him. But his passions, it may be said, will tempt him in certain circumstances to form a wrong judgment. No matter. He must follow it without hesitation. His passions indicate the will of the Deity: Is it then proper to indulge *lust* in all circumstances? And does the law of nature authorise such indulgence?—“Certainly, my good friends,” our author will reply, “that warm desire which is implanted in human nature cannot be

“ criminal when pursued after such a man-  
 “ ner as tends most to promote the happiness  
 “ of the persons, and to propagate and pre-  
 “ serve the species\*.” The principles of Lord  
 Herbert lead him to defend the same *enlarged*  
 plan of action, although he expresseth him-  
 self on the subject with more modesty. “ Id  
 “ solummodo contendo, ut mitiore sententia  
 “ de iis statuamus, qui corporea, brutali, et  
 “ tantum non necessaria propensione in pec-  
 “ cata prolabuntur.” Thus it appears that  
 incest, sodomy, and murder, which have  
 been condemned as atrocious violations of  
 the law of nature, are rendered conformable  
 to the unalterable rule of right by certain  
 circumstances, and are justified by “ the im-  
 “ mutable will of the Deity!”

But to all this an inexperienced reader  
 will perhaps object, that he has a certain  
 troublesome consciousness, a *sense* of good  
 and evil implanted in his mind, of which it  
 is sometimes difficult to suppress the disap-  
 probation. This effort a formidable cham-  
 pion of the same cause will enable him to

\* *Christ. &c.* p. 345.

accomplish with facility. He will assure him that there is no such thing as “moral sense” or instinct endowed with the property of “distinguishing good from evil. Such a “sense,” he will say, “may be acquired by long habit, and by true philosophical devotion; but it is whimsical to assume it to be natural\*.” The sparkle of internal perception trampled thus rudely under foot, is extinguished in a moment.

From this account of the tenets that are inculcated by the friends of religious freedom, when we pass to their explanation of the doctrines and institutions of Christianity, the contrast is calculated to make a deep and permanent impression upon minds that are unprovided of the means of resistance. It is on this copious subject that they employ every art by which the Christian scheme may be rendered as completely hateful and ridiculous as their own is represented to be captivating and attractive. A few lines of both pictures, as standing in opposition to

\* *Beltingbr. vol. 5. p. 479.*

each other, I shall here select for the reader's examination.

Christianity then, as opposed to the law of nature, must be seen at first with some disadvantage when it is considered as particular, *i. e.* as being limited in its extent and influence. Accordingly in the passage which has been quoted, and in many others, which might be drawn from the writings of Lord Herbert, this objection is enforced as decisive \*. Natural religion offers to our view, according to the judgment of one of those authors, a Deity who is all goodness and beneficence, and of whom we can at no time be afraid †. Christianity, on the contrary, arms this Being with terrifying attributes, and describes him as incensed against many of his creatures ‡, upon whom he threatens to inflict severe and unnecessary punishment. The enchanted castle, the burning lake, the steepy cliff, are objects of this religion which

\* See his *Religio Laici* *passim*.

† *Shaftesbury's Lett. on Enthus.*

‡ *Christ. as old as the Creat. p. 205. 250. 255.*

the light of well-informed reason discovers to be imaginary\*.

The law of nature thus easy, free, and liberal in its principles, gives at the same time an unbounded licence to action. The world, according to its spirit, is an immense common along which the happy inhabitants may roam without restraint, indulging sensual gratification, and acting upon every occasion as the circumstances in which they are placed seem to require. The Christian law, on the other hand, clogged with positive institutions, enforced by arbitrary commands†, consisting of unconnected precepts‡, and enjoining implicit and unconditional acquiescence ||, involves its votaries in endless doubts and fears§, and is the parent of persecution, superstition, and discord †.

\* *Boling. Lett. on Hist. p. 346.*

† *Christ. as old as the Creat. p. 125.*

‡ *Bolingbroke's works, vol. 4. p. 297.*

|| *Charact. vol. 3. p. 231.*

§ *Christ. as old as the Creat. p. 125.*

† *Id. ibid.*

Of representations thus soothing to the passions of men upon one side, and mortifying to self-love and vanity on the other, the effect must correspond to the energy and propriety. This effect is rendered complete, when forms of the latter kind that are exhibited in description receive their last heightening from the pencil of Ridicule. Attentive therefore to a matter of so much importance, the votaries of this new divinity employ her influence, to the infinite entertainment of their humble imitators, in exciting the sneer of contempt, when they cannot raise the frown of abhorrence. If indeed we will take those gentlemen's word for it, the doctrines of Christianity have occasioned innumerable maladies, for which Nature, in the superabundance of her compassion to mankind, has entrusted them with the only infallible panacea.

——— *Sunt certa piacula, quæ te  
Ter pure lecto poterunt recreare libello.*

It may be entertaining to remark on the manner in which this sovereign specific is applied as a remedy.

You

You have been guilty of one, or of many bad actions, by reflecting upon which you are rendered unhappy. Convinced that your conduct merits chastisement from the justice of the Supreme Legislator, you wish to know by what means its demand will be satisfied. You have recourse, I will suppose, to the sacred writings in the first instance. There, reformation and repentance are the means, and happiness both in a present and future state is the consequence attendant on their application. You view the perfections of God as displayed in those books. But from attributes which co-operate to accomplish one purpose without coincidence or inconsistency, the mind draws no other consolation than that of which the means above mentioned are productive.

Mark now the sovereign efficacy of the new catholicon in this situation. You apply for counsel to one of the most eminent professors of our intellectual empiricism. "What! my young friend, (says he) are you really frightened by the bugbears which a few canting zealots have conjured up, of future reward and punishment? Believe me, Y " all

“ all religionists are narrow spirited wretches,  
 “ and are rendered miserable by this silly  
 “ persuasion. Hear the polite, the re-  
 “ fined, the liberal! We have agreed to a  
 “ man in considering those pious narrations  
 “ as children’s tales, and the amusement of  
 “ the mere vulgar \*.” But this, my Lord, is  
 a doctrine clearly inculcated by the authors  
 of the sacred volumes. It is by their au-  
 thority that I am induced to believe it.  
 “ All good (he replies), but whence is it  
 “ that the facetious entertaining pleasant  
 “ compositions of those merry gentlemen  
 “ spread this gloom over your countenance?  
 “ To me there is something so peculiarly  
 “ chearful in the style, parables, exhortations,  
 “ images, comparisons of the author of those  
 “ writings, that it is impossible not to be  
 “ moved in a pleasant manner at their re-  
 “ cital †.” I understand this pleasantry, my  
 Lord, but the religion of nature seems to  
 countenance this doctrine. What ought I to  
 think concerning religion in general? “ *Vive*  
 “ *la bagatelle!* Laugh, my friend, and be

\* *Character. Miscel.* 3. *cb.* 2.

† *Id.*



“ chearful. I knew a club of merry gentle-  
 “ men who in a travelling expedition, meet-  
 “ ing with sorry roads and worfe fare, *laughed*  
 “ themselves into a belief that both roads,  
 “ accommodations, and cookery were per-  
 “ fectly good. But you must by no means  
 “ infer maliciously from this story of my  
 “ travelling friends, that I mean to represent  
 “ it as an easy matter for people to persuade  
 “ themselves into what opinion or belief  
 “ they please. If you shall desire however to  
 “ imitate my conduct, you will always put  
 “ yourself in good humour when you think  
 “ on the subject of religion\*.”

From the judgment of our noble author thus explicitly delivered, you appeal to the decision of another apostle of paradoxical memory. After having heard your account of the matter with great attention, this philosopher “ lays the ax at once to the root of  
 “ the tree.” He not only removes your apprehension of future punishment, but he informs you, that, be the matter as it may, you cannot have done any thing that deserves

\* *Character. Miscel. vol. 1. p. 28.*

chastisement. “ You mistake,” says he, “ my  
 “ friend, the nature of virtue, which consists  
 “ altogether in the usefulness or agreeableness  
 “ of qualities to the person himself possessed  
 “ of them, or to others who have any inter-  
 “ course with him \*. I have disrobed the  
 “ goddess of the dismal dress with which  
 “ many divines and some philosophers have  
 “ covered her. She talks not of useless auste-  
 “ rities and rigours, suffering and self de-  
 “ nial †. Believe me, you have been misled  
 “ in your notions of right and wrong by spe-  
 “ cious impostors, who render themselves the  
 “ idols of an ignorant mob by promoting  
 “ pious frauds, and implicit faith, and the  
 “ Lord knows what ‡. You have fallen into  
 “ certain errors. Be it so. Virtue adopts some  
 “ errors, because they are salutary ||. Take  
 “ therefore

\* *Hume's Essays*, vol. 3. p. 188.

† *Id.* p. 190.

‡ *Vol.* 1. p. 277. &c.

|| *Vol.* 3. p. 190. Our author ought here to have established a criterion by which we may distinguish the adopted children of virtue from her genuine offspring. For, among those same excellent errors which this Divinity dignifies by her patronage in his estimation, every  
 man,

“ therefore what course you please in life.  
“ But be careful at all times, and in every  
“ circumstance, to despise and to hate the  
“ ministers of religion.”

A third advocate of the same cause, exalted to an eminence raised upon the broad foundation of the eternal reason, and moral fitness of things, looking down with compassion upon those who occupy an inferior station, addresseth to you the following exhortation.

“ My dear friends,” says he, “ who live  
“ under the unsupportable bondage of super-  
“ stition, I pity you with all my heart. You  
“ hate, and damn, and persecute one another  
“ about a few silly observances. And you are  
“ so absurd as to believe that God has given  
“ his creatures arbitrary commands. You are  
“ the dupes of designing men, who deprive  
“ you of your natural rights and freedom.

man, without such a criterion, will be ready to rank his own. Now, as all errors are not equally salutary, certain improprieties may arise from this conduct. It is to be hoped that they who are versant in Mr H——’s philosophy, and who adopt his principles, will supply this defect.

“ My

“ My purpose is to restore you to both. Go-  
 “ verned by no servile motives, I will deliver  
 “ you from the endless quarrels and fatal di-  
 “ visions in which you have been involved  
 “ during many ages. And, in place of the  
 “ hope and fear of future reward and punish-  
 “ ment, I will establish as the rule of your  
 “ conduct the *great charter of nature*, the ori-  
 “ ginal obligation of the moral fitness of  
 “ things. I will make your duty delightful,  
 “ by showing that it is indissolubly connect-  
 “ ed with your truest interest. You have  
 “ been long held in bondage by the forms  
 “ and ceremonies of an external revelation,  
 “ which I have proved to be unnecessary.  
 “ Shake off therefore restraints which mar at  
 “ the time when they circumscribe your gra-  
 “ tifications. In one word: Ye are the chil-  
 “ dren of nature; enjoy your privileges;  
 “ BE FREE \*.”

From the specimens that have been adduced of description, of ridicule, and of declamatory profession, the reader will observe some part of the means which the adversaries

\* *Christ. as old as the Creat.* p. 125. 34. 363.

of our religion employ to conciliate his regard, and to influence his love of imitation. Their effect will be most clearly discerned, when they are placed before him in one point of view, and are compared with the theory which they have been brought to illustrate.

The mind, as at all times, so more particularly in early life, is apt to be biased in behalf of whatever is seemingly noble, liberal, beneficent. Every strenuous, manly, and daring effort, is at this season the peculiar object of its admiration. And this falls out, not merely because the effort itself is an indication of fortitude, but, where religion is concerned, because every attempt of this kind impresseth a favourable idea of the author's sincerity. The passions at the same time require gratification, and do not permit that an inquiry should be carried minutely into the nature of their demands. The advocates of natural religion, taking advantage of these circumstances, excite the admiration, conciliate the favour, and interest the passions of inexperienced readers, by means which have been enumerated. They profess to set the mind at liberty from the yoke of authority  
and

and of arbitrary commands, by which its sphere of enjoyment is circumscribed, and its exertions are subjected to controul. With this purpose, they call the powers of ridicule to their assistance. And they captivate imagination as effectually by the grotesque forms under which they represent the opinions of their adversaries, as by that assemblage of beautiful colours which they throw upon their own.

It is my purpose, in this work, to guard my young readers against a prepossession which so many motives concur in establishing, and which co-operates with their esteem of the persons who adopt these sentiments, and with their love of imitation. Your suspicion, therefore, my young friend, when so many specious lures are hung out to mislead your judgment, ought to begin at yourself, instead of respecting the religion of Jesus, or its advocates. A prejudice of the present, as of every kind, will gather strength from indulgence. But this is so far more dangerous than any other prepossession, as the most powerful principles of action, the passions and the appetites of human nature, will de-  
rive

rive unbounded gratification from its prevalence. Every argument in favour of revelation will be seen through a false medium, when you are prejudiced against the principles which it is brought to establish. On the contrary, plausible declamation will be magnified into evidence, when you are prepossessed in behalf of the doctrine to which it relates. In both cases, therefore, it is most probable that TRUTH will be overlooked.

Do you require then that I should lay aside prepossession *altogether*, when I examine religious evidence? This, you will say, is impossible even in common cases. For the mind takes an involuntary bias from incidental circumstances, of which the relation to the principal point is remote and precarious. On a subject, therefore, so deeply and so universally interesting as that of religion, it is less able to resist their influence. In the present instance, I make no such requisition in its full import. I mean not wholly to subvert the cause, but to expose its worst and most dangerous effects. When every plausible artifice is employed to heighten prepossession on one side, and to strengthen aversion on the

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other,

other, he who lays open these artifices with impartiality, although he cannot correct the predilection, may prevent it from influencing the decision of understanding. Unmoved by affirmation, and suspicious of plausibility, a man will judge coolly of the question that is placed before him. Whereas, with a strong partiality to either side, artfully and imperceptibly augmented, his ultimate decision will most probably be false, and cannot certainly at any rate be founded on just reasoning.

At the time when I endeavour to guard my young readers against prepossession, it may be proper to evince, that the shewy representation of which so many specimens have been exhibited, is unsupported by argument. He who examines this subject with attention, will find a powerful evidence of the divine authority of our religion, in considering the inconsistent schemes which they who reject Christianity have substituted in its place. The present case offers a new proof of this truth, which may be added to those that have already been produced. Certain plain questions respecting natural religion will



will occur to every reader as proper to be explained, in the solution of which its panegyrist ought to be agreed. They will enquire, What is the religion of nature? In what principles is this religion founded? By what laws is it regulated? What are the bounds by which it is terminated? and what duties does it prescribe?

These questions are surely suggested by the subject, and ought to be determined with precision, if any points whatever deserve to be treated in this manner. But we shall find from examination, that the friends of the law of nature have never yet agreed in their opinions upon any of those topics. Far less, therefore, are they prepared to give a consistent and rational account of the whole matter.

The *notitiæ communes* of the eminent author above mentioned are in truth so far from being universal characteristics, that some of them are reprobated even by his immediate successors in the same department. His doctrine of immortality, impressed upon every mind, comes out to be “like children’s tales,

“ the amusement of the mere vulgar \*.” His idea of punishment is inconsistent with our notion of the goodness of the Deity †. His maxim, that pardon will be the effect of repentance, is wholly irreconcilable to the more enlarged plans of his successors. Of them, some attempt to destroy the distinction of good and evil altogether, by making both to depend upon the authority of civil laws ‡: others deny the existence of a moral sense, by means of which this distinction is perceived §: while a third class, bolder than either of the former, endeavour to annihilate those perfections of the divine Mind from the contemplation of which the penitent sinner derives all his confidence, satisfaction, and hope ||.

What then is natural religion?—A religion including whatever relates to the reason

\* *Character. Miscel.* 3. ch. 2.

† *Shaftes. Let. on Enthuf.*

‡ *Hobbes de Cive, cap. 6. &c.*

§ *Boling. vol. 5. p. 479.*

|| *Id. vol. 5. p. 311. 99. 359. Dial. on Nat. Rel.*

and nature of things \*.—Upon what principles is this religion founded? Upon eternal obligation, and moral fitness; or upon the dread of invifible powers feigned or imagined, as the confequence of certain tales publifhed to the world †; or finally, upon circumftances, the recollection of which never fails to put a man of wit and fine tafte into good humour ‡. By what laws is this religion regulated? By the fituation in which a man is placed §; or by our reafon collecting the will of God from the fund of our natures phyfical and moral. ||. Is it univerfal or particular? Are its laws written on the hearts of all men, or are they locally and imperfectly communicated?—Either one or other is the cafe according to the authors whom you confult. Ask one of thofe gentlemen. The law of nature, he will tell you, is abfolutely perfect, incapable of addition or diminution ¶. No fuch matter, another will reply. The beft

\* *Tindal ubi fup.*

† *Hobbes.*

‡ *Charact. vol. 1. p. 28.*

§ *Tind.*

|| *Boling. vol. 5. p. 100.*

¶ *Tindal. Chrift. p. 3.*

systems of Pagan morality were intermixed and blended with so much superstition, and so many gross absurdities as quite eluded and defeated the main design of them \*. A third will affirm, that this reason of which you are so vain, far from pointing out your duty, cannot ascertain the existence of the being by whom this duty is said to be prescribed †. And to sum up all, a fourth will tell you, that the mind is not endowed with any sense by which you can distinguish good from evil, or evil from good ‡.

Amidst this chaos of fluctuating opinions, are you not, my young reader, like Noah's dove before the waters were abated, unable to "find a place on which to rest the sole of your foot?" The beautiful prospects which seemed to look gay and smiling at a distance, vanish like the colours of the rainbow when you approach towards them. The church, composed of all nations united by certain universal signatures; this church dissolves at the

\* *Mor. Philos. view of the Deist. Writ. vol. 1. p. 202.*

† *Hobbes, Hume, Toulmin Philos. Eff. p. 224. Dial. on Nat. Rel. pass.*

‡ *Bolingbroke, vol. 5. p. 86.*

instant when you arrive at its precincts. And you perceive that its members have departed, escorted by B——y's matter, T——l's moral fitness and eternal obligation; B——e's idea of a patriot King, the *spirits* of Hobbes \*, the quiddities of Aquinas, and the vibrations of H——ly; with the purpose of occupying certain vacant tenements in the island of Utopia.

The theory of a writer of the present age stands so immediately in opposition to that which we have endeavoured to explain and to illustrate in the present section, that I cannot pass it over in justice to the subject without animadversion. The fourth cause to which the celebrated author of the History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire ascribes the progress of Christianity, "the pure and *austere* morals of Christians," is that which I propose to examine upon the present occasion. For if it shall be found true, that the advancement of our religion was forwarded by this cause operating either on the desire of imitation, or on any other desire, the received opinions of mankind in all

\* *Vide supra*, p. 52. N.

former ages, as well as observations that are founded upon those opinions, must fall to the ground. Before the present happy period, men have endeavoured to recommend themselves to the young, and the dissipated, by manners remote from austerity, and by principles adapted to their practice. Even the pleas of our author's fellow-labourers in the vineyard of infidelity are deprived of all their efficacy by the present hypothesis. And to those gentlemen's acknowledged want of *austere and rigid morals*, we must attribute the final disappointment of their efforts to efface the fabric of revelation. With all my heart, ye illustrious advocates of religious freedom, who, emancipated from the bondage of superstition, have indulged a manly licence in practice as well as in opinion! Ye sons of nature, who vindicating the rights of your Parent, would destroy the foe by whom you deem that her privileges are invaded! Know, that you must *reform your lives*, if you would succeed in your attempt. You must substitute, in order to spread your opinions universally, severe restraint in place of licentious freedom; and the practice of monastic austerities in succession to the blandishments

ments of voluptuous sensation. Thus will you prove, by becoming the objects of general imitation, a theory to be well founded which we shall now endeavour to show, that experience and argument will be ineffectual to establish.

With this purpose, let us bring the novel hypothesis of our author to the test. The advocate of *pure* morality cannot be unacceptable to the friends of a religion, whose authors at the same time taught and exemplified the purest moral system. If it shall appear that he has erred in his notions of the nature and effects of this morality, it will be necessary to detect and to rectify his misapprehension.

It is a known truth that the primitive Christians, considered in general, were the most pious and virtuous body of men that ever appeared in the world. “ One of the topics, “ says the learned and judicious Leland, on “ which the ancient Christian writers constantly insist in their writings against the “ heathens, and in their apologies, is the  
A a “ mighty

“ mighty change that was wrought in the  
 “ lives and manners of those who embraced  
 “ Christianity \*.” On this subject it is less  
 necessary to be particular, because our author  
 himself is profuse of testimonies, among  
 which that of Pliny is one of the most re-  
 markable. We acknowledge farther, with  
 Mr G. that this purity of manners in the  
 professors of a new religion is one of the  
 best characters by which it can be recom-  
 mended ; and may be justly assigned as a  
 cause of its progress. Had this gentleman  
 therefore adhered strictly to the present view  
 of his subject, every friend of religion would  
 have concurred in his sentiments. But to  
 the term *pure* this writer hath tacked an epi-  
 thet of inauspicious import, for such with-  
 out doubt is the phrase *austere* in its present  
 connection. And as a proof that this term  
 has been applied with mature deliberation,  
 we shall see immediately, that our author’s  
 examples relate wholly to the practice of au-  
 sterities as having forwarded the propagation  
 of our religion.

Two questions will occur as necessary to

\* *View of the Deist. Writ. vol. 2. 557.*



be resolved from this state of the matter. By what tests are we to judge that the first Christians practised this rigid morality? and granting them to have practised it, in what manner did this practice contribute to the advancement of their religion? Let us hear Mr G. in answer to both questions.

Among Christians of the first ages he informs us, that “ a first marriage was declared *unanimously* to be adequate to all the purposes of nature and of society. The practice of second nuptials was branded, he tells us, with the name of legal adultery. Desire among the first Christians was imputed as a crime, and marriage was tolerated as a defect. A state of celibacy was the nearest approach to the divine perfection.” Again. “ Their, the Christians, gloomy looks, and *austere* aspect, their abhorrence of the common business and pleasures of life, and their frequent predictions of impending calamities, inspired the Pagans with the apprehension of some danger which would arise from the new sect, the more alarming as it was the more obscure.” Our author completes his horrible picture of

Christian austerities, by which the Pagan multitudes were so irresistibly captivated, by adding as the last heightening of his pencil, that the virtue of the primitive Christians, like that of the first Romans, was very frequently guarded by poverty and ignorance \*."

It is not our business at present to inquire whether the zeal of this writer has not prompted him to give an expression rather too strong and too austere to some features of his portrait. Let us contemplate the whole piece as it is placed before us. The reader has already anticipated the conclusion. He pronounces, that the continued interposition of extraordinary providence was exerted in establishing a church framed by these laws, and composed of these members. And he judges, that a miracle must have been wrought to bring an individual to join himself to so rigid and so detestable a community. Such I will venture to say is the decision which an impartial reader will pronounce *a primo facie*, from Mr G's account of this matter. But is there a man who can believe, that gloomy

\* Gibbons, vol. 1. p. 577. 578. 629.

looks, and declared abhorrence of business and of pleasure, predictions of impending calamities, prohibition of natural and of rational indulgence, poverty, ignorance; and in one word, institutions of which the tendency is to depopulate the world, were employed as means of immediate efficacy to render the religion of Jesus universal? And shall we say that these circumstances tend to promote the scheme on which they are attendant? Every principle of human nature is subverted by this hypothesis, which must be raised upon the ruin of whatever hath been esteemed fair, and beautiful, and attractive?

But, granting the case to have been as Mr G—— represents it, the reader's attention will be called to the second question. By what means, he will ask, did the practice of those austerities advance Christianity in the estimation of our author? The loss of all the enjoyments that render life comfortable was compensated, in his opinion, by the single acquisition of spiritual pride. "Even the Pagan multitudes," he tells us, "were inclined to estimate the merit of the sacrifice by its apparent difficulty\*." As this gentle-

\* *Gibbons, vol. 1. p. 579.*

man seems to be seriously of this judgment, and as his work, which has great historical merit, stands high in the public estimation, I shall lay the matter fully before the reader, and shall leave him to judge for himself.

History, that mirror in which the foibles and weaknesses, as well as the virtues of men, are clearly reflected, exhibits, no doubt, examples of religious extravagancies that have imposed for a season upon ignorant and superstitious multitudes. An uninformed mind is apt to think that the favour of an offended Deity may be conciliated by the practice of certain austerities, without considering how greatly this idea tends to depreciate the divine nature and perfections. A principle of this kind, therefore, being once established, it is obvious that he who perseveres most steadily in the exercise of religious discipline, and who overcomes the temptations by which his course might be obstructed, is most immediately the object of vulgar admiration. Magnanimity and fortitude, virtues that powerfully excite the desire of imitation, are ascribed to the rigid disciplinarian. And while some are captivated by the respectful  
attention

attention wherewith those virtues are contemplated, and others by the supposed importance of the cause in which they are displayed, many may be induced to imitate his example. It is in this process of observation that we shall find the true cause of an acknowledged fact, That persecution, contrary to the views of its abettors, has contributed in all ages to increase the sect or party which it has been employed to exterminate. Our admiration of the intrepidity and perseverance of the sufferers is ready to mislead reason in the examination of their principles. The mind is disposed to judge favourably concerning these, in the present case, from the apparent greatness of their effects.

While we make these acknowledgements in favour of religious austerities in general, it is proper that the limits should be ascertained, within which their influence is circumscribed. On this subject I shall endeavour to prove the truth of the two following observations. The first is, that, whatever effect we may ascribe to the practice of austere morals, their influence must be confined to the sects or parties of an *established* religious community.

community. To an unformed and infant society such practice must prove destructive. The second remark is, that, even among sects, the effect of those austerities, though sometimes violent, has never been permanent or universal.

Our first observation, which respects the practice of certain austerities, as having influence only under an establishment, may be confirmed without much difficulty. Among the parties which spring up under fixed ecclesiastical government, and where the tendency of moral precepts is generally understood, he who shall professedly adhere to the letter of certain rules, will be judged at worst to have erred upon the right side, by attempting to be righteous in the extreme. The faith of more rational members of the same community will not be shaken by this conduct of one or of many individuals; and their sentiments of the nature and tendency of general laws and institutions will remain unalterable. The reason is obvious. "We are acquainted," they will say, "with the principles of this religion. We are satisfied that it enjoins the practice of no austerities that  
" are

“ are inconsistent with innocent gratification.  
“ The best regulations may be abused or  
“ perverted by the patrons of singular opi-  
“ nions. But our own judgment of this  
“ matter, and our conduct as regulated by  
“ it, are invariably the same.”

After this manner will men reason who adhere to doctrines which they have received upon examination. But respecting the introduction of a new religion, the matter is wholly different. No man will pretend to say that practices which in an established church are overlooked, or are tolerated as necessary evils, can be the natural means of procuring members to an infant society. On the contrary, we must be convinced that such practices will tend immediately and infallibly to subvert it. Men require to be flattered and soothed into acquiescence with tenets which oppose their ancient prejudices and notions, how irrational soever these may be. He therefore who should attempt to substitute in their place rigorous injunctions, and to impress conviction by authority, would very effectually defeat the purpose which he might desire to accomplish. And if we should either

treat the doctrines of such a man with contempt, or should reject his plan with indignation, he must consider both as consequences arising naturally from his mode of introduction.

If the preceding observations are well founded, the absurdity of our author's notions in the present instance must be incontestably evident. For, according to his hypothesis, we must believe, that, by the authoritative command of a few obscure wanderers, multitudes were induced to renounce all the rites, forms, and ceremonies of a religion, consecrated by general use, and rendered venerable by a succession of ages. We must believe, that those men renouncing riches, pleasure, business, whatever in short renders life or even existence comfortable, embraced contempt, indigence, persecution, hatred, reproach; their former principles and belief being wholly eradicated by the contemplation of certain enjoyments to be obtained in another state, with the nature of which they were wholly unacquainted. In one word, we must believe, either that human nature in the first ages of Christianity was radically  
and



and essentially different from human nature at any former or succeeding period, or that the scheme of Mr G——, founded in the *faith* of this imaginary opposition, and deriving all its authority from this *faith*, is utterly incredible and absurd.

It is only necessary to observe farther on this subject, that the present occasion offers to us a striking example of the contradictory theories of deistical writers, of which we have already brought some remarkable proofs. With this view we may remark, that the polite and witty author of the *Characteristics* entertains notions on this subject that are opposite in every circumstance to the gloomy ideas of our author. “Whatever “ambitious spirit,” says the noble author, “may inspire a religious founder, whatever “savage zeal or persecuting principle may “lie in reserve, ready to disclose itself when “authority and power is once obtained, the “*first scene of doctrine* however fails not to “present us with the agreeable views of *joy*, “*love, meekness, gentleness, and moderation.*” Why this, my Lord? “Because,” he replies, “the affection and love which procures a  
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“true

“ true adherence to the new religious foundation, must depend either on a real or  
 “ counterfeit goodness in the founder \*.”

Here then two zealous advocates of the same cause, propose to effectuate one purpose by means betwixt which there is invincible repugnance. They differ *toto cælo* in their account of the same fact; and of their hypotheses one must certainly be false. Thus far indeed the noble author seems to be in the right, that the founder of a new religion ought, in ordinary cases, to present the fair and attractive side of his scheme to mankind at his first setting out; because he will find it necessary to fix their attention by superadding the charm of pleasure to the allurements of novelty. COMMON SENSE will suggest both to this founder, and to his successors, the impropriety of preaching the doctrines of penance and mortification in the first instance. Such doctrines, it will inform him, will tend to frighten and repel the multitude in *these cases*, who will not enter immediately into the spiritual enjoyments by which those known evils are compensated.

\* *Miscel.*

To this SENSE therefore the scheme of Mr G—, who assigns the above mentioned *known evils* as causes of the propagation of Christianity, appears to be repugnant. But while we find this writer's conclusion to be inadequate, let us acknowledge that many of the facts which he relates are incontestable. It has been proved in a former section, that the moral precepts of the gospel tended to fix a prepossession that was unfavourable to its influence. And it is true, that Christians of the first ages, by following the latter of those precepts, adopted customs, which temperate thought, and the principles of their religion properly understood, would have taught them to reject. The first scene of doctrine, therefore, did not present agreeable views of joy, moderation, and meekness, according to the noble author's account of the matter. On the contrary, it opened with a display of objects that are the most unfavourable to sensual gratification, and with views which pleasure is averse to contemplate.

From these observations, it is therefore sufficiently obvious, that the schemes above mentioned, although opposite to each other,  
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are equally dissatisfactory: The latter, because it contains a false representation of facts: And the former, because, admitting the facts to be well founded, the effects ascribed to them are absurd and incredible \*.

Our second observation on the practice of austerities was, that not only is their efficacy confined to the sects of an established religion; but that even within this circumscribed sphere, their effects, although sometimes striking and strongly marked, have never been permanent or universal. Some

\* Some readers may object to our remarks on the opposite schemes of Lord S—— and Mr G——, that there is no real contradiction betwixt these, because the former speaks of the Author of our religion, and the latter of his successors. But this objection will vanish when we reflect that by the words “first scene” the noble writer clearly understands all that passed, or that ought to have passed before “authority and power” was obtained.” Mr G—— pretends likewise to specify the means by which these great purposes were accomplished. It is therefore obvious, that the joy, moderation, and meekness of the one considered as means of acquiring power and authority, stand directly in opposition to the gloomy looks, contracted views, and austere deportment by which the same ends were effectuated according to the other.

remarks

remarks on this subject shall conclude the section.

The causes have been enumerated at length which contribute to render austere morals, upon some occasions, objects of imitation. On this subject, history confirms a truth which reflection suggests to us. This truth is, that the extreme which excites admiration and astonishment by its novelty, hath never produced lasting effects in any age ; and that no effect of extensive influence can arise from it. Without searching for proofs of this fact in the records of antiquity, we find it confirmed by abundant evidence in the history of this nation during the last century, and even at the beginning of the present. It is well known, that the most flagrant examples of enthusiastic austerity that were ever exhibited on the theatre of the world, characterise the times of the commonwealth of England, and of those perhaps that immediately preceded it. It is as much an useless as it would be an endless task, to enumerate particular examples to this purpose. They form too material a part of the character of the times, to be omitted in the work of any historian.

an. We see miserable enthusiasts denying themselves the necessaries of life, as well as renouncing the pleasures of society. Sometimes we see those men indulging their reveries in unfrequented deserts ; and sometimes we observe them breaking forcibly into churches, believing that they were divinely commissioned to disturb in their official exercises the ministers of religion. A military apostle enters on the scene at one time, making war, at the head of his regiment, from religious motives, upon the bears by whose gambols the citizens of London were diverted. On another occasion, our attention is drawn to preachers of the gospel, imitating the manners, imagining that they had caught the spirit of the warriors and prophets of the Old Testament. These are a few among many objects which those wretched times present to be contemplated.

But what was the end of all this extravagance ? It was the frolic of a day ; too various and striking indeed to be passed over without attention, but too violent to be accompanied by any permanent effects. The devouring gulph of time, swallowed up one sect after

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ter another, which shooting successively across the hemisphere, sunk at once into oblivion. Among all those enthusiasts, the people denominated quakers are the only sectarians who have remained to the present times. But they subsist, by having dropped the wilder peculiarities which originally distinguished their founders; and by the mild and pacific genius of their religious institution. Their sect likewise circumscribed within narrow limits, has never comprehended “the multitude.” And we have not at present the least reason to believe that it will ever become formidable from its numbers.

What conclusion results from these observations? This surely we may infer, that if actions seemingly conformed to the principles of an established religion, failed to impress the *Christian multitudes*, and to produce steady imitation, there is much less reason to believe, that the *Pagan multitudes* could have been induced to sacrifice all the pleasures of life, to the practice of similar austerities, in imitation of men whom they had been taught to hate and despise, and in compliance to a religion known only by the ri-

gour of its laws, the feverity of its discipline, and the gloomy predictions and forbidding manners of its founders.

Upon the whole, I have endeavoured, in my remarks on the scheme of Mr G. and on the present subject in general, to prove the following propositions: 1. That he who promulgates a new institution to mankind, will find his interest in rendering the first view of it as agreeable and pleasing as possible: 2. That rigid injunctions, and austere practice, although tolerated in a fixed, must be subversive of an infant society: 3. That the inspired author of the Christian religion, published unpopular doctrines to the world; and that the first Christians heightened every disagreeable circumstance, by a conduct the most difficult to be imitated. From the proof of these facts, we have gained sufficient evidence to establish the following conclusion: That the austere morals of the first Christian teachers, formed an obstruction to the progress of their religion, which the immediate interposition of its first and great cause, was alone adequate to remove. It is therefore obvious, that this author's attempt  
to



to account for the propagation of Christianity by a natural cause in the present instance, produceth a strong argument, that no natural cause was equal to the production of this great effect; and that supernatural energy was actually employed with this purpose. His arguments therefore in this case, as in a former one, tend to establish the truth which they are brought to invalidate, and to subvert the proposition which they are adduced to confirm.

I shall conclude this section by observing, that my remarks on the new scheme of Mr G. opposed to that of Lord Shaftesbury, and in general, on the incompatible theories of Deistical writers in subjects of religion and of philosophy, have one fixed purpose in view. This purpose is to evince, that whatever are the pretensions of these men, and whatever success has attended on their attempts to render a bad cause agreeable, yet that their plans, when closely investigated, will be found essentially defective. In the pursuit of one end, and even in the investigation of one fact, I have endeavoured in the present section to prove, that those are not more in-

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sistent

sistent with truth, than irreconcilable with each other.

## S E C T. VI.

### *Of the Charge of Credulity.*

OF means by which the patrons of infidelity render themselves patterns of imitation, contempt of credulity and of credulous men is one of the most effectual. Attention to the nature of this charge will discover the cause of its efficacy in the present instance. Novel and singular opinions are calculated principally to impress the young and inconsiderate among mankind. At a time when the general subjects of investigation are deemed to be exhausted, the mind, fatigued with the sameness of its pursuits and of its inquiries, finds in novelty something that relieves its lassitude, and that excites its activity. Prepossessed therefore in favour of objects which sparkle before the eye of imagination, readers of this class are induced, without difficulty, to receive them as realities. Their propensity to follow this course is no doubt increased by discovering, that these objects are connected with general and with licentious indulgence.

But

But with the charge which we propose to consider in the present section, the case is widely different. The effect of this impeachment is by no means to be traced only among the frivolous and the dissipated. They of the more rational and intelligent class of men, whose minds are inaccessible to other attacks, yet submit with impatience to the imputation of credulity. This epithet, and that of folly, are of the same import in the general estimation. And it is no doubt true, that he to whom the former designation is applied with propriety is in many instances characterised by the latter.

Apprised of all the advantages which they derive from this plea, the adversaries of our religion urge it, as I shall endeavour to evince, with greater energy, and have recourse to it more frequently than to any other, in order completely to effectuate their design. On this subject the following questions occur to be examined ; a satisfactory discussion of which will divest the present cause of infidelity at least of some part of its energy. What, it will be inquired, is the nature of this charge, and from what causes is derived  
its

its efficacy ? By what arguments is a plea of such powerful efficacy against Christians enforced by the adversaries of their religion ? And what idea ought we to form of that FAITH which they stigmatize by so obnoxious an appellation ?—In reply to these inquiries, we offer the following observations.

By the term *credulity* I understand a general and undistinguishing faith, extended, not merely to common, but more particularly to marvellous and extraordinary doctrines or occurrences, without any proper examination of evidence, as being either defective or complete. It is a circumstance somewhat extraordinary, that though men are in general agreed in one explanation of this epithet, yet no term whatever is more grossly misapplied in particular instances. And there is not at the same time any phrase of which the misapplication is productive of more dangerous effects. Let us try an example.

You have been often told, that one of your friends, of whom you think favourably, is a man of easy faith in stories of a certain kind, although possessed otherwise of good sense,  
and

and of many valuable qualities. You have a good opinion of your friend's understanding ; and you cannot be persuaded that a charge, of which the proof should abate your opinion of his character, is well founded, until you are convinced by experiment. You contrive with this purpose to have him present with another friend, who values himself upon being less susceptible of conviction, but whose judgment you hold upon the whole in no very high estimation. While you are conversing with both, and are endeavouring to find out the real character of the former, a third person enters, who, without any knowledge of your intention, relates a very extraordinary event. He informs you, that a great army, commanded by an experienced general, and met in the open plain, had been routed by an inconsiderable party, with whom they encountered accidentally. You are all interested in the truth of this story ; and you wish to know the evidence whereby it is supported. Your friend produceth a letter from a man who was actually present in the battle, and who was himself involved in the general rout. He says, that the army was thrown into confusion, not by the skill  
or

or by the efforts of the enemy ; but they considered this detached troop as the forerunners of forces equal, if not superior to their own, who might have lurked among the contiguous eminences, and whose attack they were not prepared to resist. You are all satisfied, that the writer of the letter is a man of honour and of veracity. What judgment do you form of his evidence ?

He who is difficult of belief pronounceth the story at once to be incredible. “ I am acquainted,” says he, “ with the commander of this army, and *I am certain* that he would never be unprovided of means to defend himself against any sudden attack. Besides,” he will add, “ the disproportion of numbers betwixt the victorious and the vanquished troops is so great, where no second army was really in fight, that I cannot believe the affair to have been as this man represents it.” You mention the known character of your informer, and the circumstance of his having been present in the action. But he over-rules these objections, by saying, “ that the man may have had some purpose in view, for which  
“ he

“ he cannot account.” He adds, perhaps, “ that having deserted his post with a few others in a panic, the narrator may have framed this story afterwards to keep himself in countenance.” But he positively avows his disbelief of the report.

He, on the other hand, who is not so confident of his own judgment as the former, reasons in this manner. “ As I am satisfied concerning the honour and veracity of the author of this letter, I do not question the truth of his information. I see nothing that is really incredible in the story of a great army being routed by a small body of men, even without the suspicion which the appearance of these is said to have raised in the present instance. History offers to our view many examples of armies, amongst whom a panic, excited by some trifling and unaccountable incident, hath spread almost in the moment of victory, and hath occasioned instant and unavoidable confusion. In the case before us, the effect is ascribed to a cause that appears to be rational and adequate.” The country in which the engagement took place is

D d                      “ mountainous.

“ mountainous. An army marches through  
“ it unsuspecting of danger. A party of the  
“ enemy appear unexpectedly. They who  
“ compose it fall upon this formidable body  
“ in despair, being determined to sell their  
“ lives as dearly as possible. These, on the  
“ contrary, astonished at the boldness of their  
“ enemies, expect every moment to see the  
“ host to which they belong descending from  
“ the surrounding hills, or perhaps starting  
“ up from their lurking places in the vallies.  
“ Fear magnifies every object. They are  
“ terrified, fall into confusion, and are over-  
“ thrown. You have this information from  
“ a man who was present in the action. Why  
“ should we reject a plain story thus simply  
“ related and strongly authenticated, because  
“ the event is somewhat uncommon ? And  
“ what purpose is gained by staining the cha-  
“ racter of a worthy man that hath till now  
“ been irreproachable ? I am sorry,” he  
might add, “ for the event : But I cannot  
“ doubt concerning its certainty.”

Permit me now, my young readers, to inquire which of those men you consider in this representation as having acted from the  
most



most rational principles? Your decision, I will suppose, is favourable to him who gave credit to so well authenticated a relation. But let us admit, that the event justifies the incredulity of the latter. It appears from the full detail of this transaction, that a panic had seized the troops at the first onset, who had fled in the utmost confusion. It is likewise known, that the author of this intelligence had failed to discover his usual courage and resolution in the present instance, and had been carried along with the torrent. But it turns out, that the commander in chief had rallied some part of his forces in their retreat; and having remarked that the conquering party was unsupported, had led those forces back to the charge. It is discovered, that these, animated by shame and by indignation, had restored the day; and that, in the end, they had been completely victorious.

The judgment of an intelligent man would, it is acknowledged, remain unbiassed by this information, and he would acquit him who gave credit to the first relation, of having exhibited any proof of credulity. He would

observe, that the faith of this man was founded upon evidence apparently incontestable. For although the author of the information deviated at this time from his usual line of conduct, yet the probability arising from the general tenor of his actions, was certainly favourable to his adherence. We cannot judge that any particular action of which we have not been eye-witnesses, is consonant to character, by another rule than that which is drawn from the course of general conduct. A judgment thus formed ought not therefore to be affected by an event which could not be foreseen.

We have said, that an intelligent man will decide from these principles. But is it from such reasons that the far greater number, who, without investigating causes, fix their eye upon the event, will form their estimate? By no means. What the former denominates a happy conjecture, the latter will dignify with the title of superior sagacity. The belief, in the same manner, that is supported by rational evidence in the opinion of a real judge, will by these be ascribed to credulity and folly. Hence it often happens,  
that

that he who is justified by the discerning few, sinks as much as his adversary rises in the public estimation ; their characters being estimated by a criterion, which, however improper or inadequate, is yet indiscriminately applied to both.

Let us reverse the hypothesis, and suppose that the incredulous man is clearly convicted of having carried his unbelief to the extreme, he will not suffer in the general opinion in the same manner as the other. If the slightest cause of his error can be assigned, it will be palliated by the designation of a mistake on the best side ; and the known maxim, “ *Humanum est errare,*” will be used in his vindication.

It is therefore obvious, that although men are agreed in the general acceptance of the term credulity, yet there are few epithets of which, in particular cases, it is more difficult to ascertain the signification. The reason appears to be, that it is no easy matter to fix upon that point or medium of proof, especially in extraordinary cases, with which the mind is satisfied, as being full and appropriated,

ated. And even when such proof is gained, the prejudices and passions of men prevent that it should have the proper effect. Thus it happens, that, from the apprehension of being deemed credulous, men are shy of professing in public their belief of certain facts or propositions, the truth of which they do not really call in question. But this is not the sole effect arising from the circumstance above mentioned. For objections of no real efficacy acquire force and validity from this apprehension: And, in one case, these seem to impair a degree of evidence, which, in another, would be considered as decisive. Prejudice upon these occasions presents the object which the mind contemplates, in points of view that are the most unfavourable. Passion likewise takes that side in the general decision which may most readily conciliate popular esteem.

Thus far we have endeavoured to explain the nature of credulity, and to point out its effects. But we cannot enter fully into this subject, without investigating the causes from which our aversion to this imputation ultimately proceeds. Of this universal reluctance,

tance, the two following causes may be assigned as being productive for the most part. The first is, that desire which many persons have to be considered as philosophers, who are superior to the prejudices and prepossessions of the vulgar. The second will be found in the injudicious management of professed instructors in the earliest season of life. On each of those points the present subject requires that we should make some observations.

Men of the world, as they are called, disclaim in general the appellation of philosopher, as an unpopular name in certain societies, and of inauspicious import. At the same time we may remark, that so far as those men can gain the reputation of persons who think for themselves by an imitation of philosophers, so far the purposes of philosophy fall within their plan; and the attainment of these becomes eligible. Hence it happens, that men who have neither ability nor inclination to weigh evidence on both sides of a question, yet profess to be incredulous in points which the lower order of men believe to be true, because this declaration

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tion gratifies their vanity by raising them to a certain imaginary eminence. Their esteem of the philosophical character betrays them into the only imitation of it that is in their power, that of appearing to be emancipated from vulgar prepossession. In the mean time, from their incapacity to judge concerning the nature of different subjects, and the proof of truths either moral or historical, they fall into a general profession of incredulity as that whereby they may be denominated men of sagacity and of discernment.

By following out this observation we shall be enabled to discover the real character of many men to whose procedure common principles are inapplicable. You mention a plain fact, or lay down a simple proposition. In a company consisting of several persons, one man calls either or both in question. You establish the truth of what you have advanced by irrefragable arguments which carry conviction to every other mind. This man adheres however to his opinion, and tells you that in some cases he cannot give credit to any other testimony than that of his own senses.

senses\*. Or should you appeal to these, he still escapes from your hold, by saying that they are fallacious, and that they ought not to be trusted†. You stare and are silent.

Is it from an examination of the evidence produced by you, of which he can therefore point out the defect, that your adversary continues to be thus obstinate? No. But this proposition or fact is believed in common with many others by men whom he regards as credulous and silly people. In the writings likewise of certain philosophers, the notable maxims above mentioned are set up as general tests, or axioms, to which their followers may have recourse in all cases of difficulty. He assumes therefore, in idea, a similarity of

\* Such, in the judgement of the judicious Leland, is the argument by which a late celebrated author endeavours to disprove the existence of a Deity. *View of the Deist. Writ. vol. 2. p. 29.* This proposition is directly laid down and maintained, as the same able casuist observes, by the author of Christianity not founded on argument. *Vol. 1. p. 421.*

† The reader will find abundant evidence of the truth of this remark in the writings of the whole tribe of infidel writers:

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character

character with the philosopher whose principles he appears to adopt upon this occasion. When to this effect of the love of imitation you superadd the pleasure arising to him from reflecting that he passeth for a man of profound sagacity, who knows much more than he chuseth to express, and who is an enemy to the common doctrine of *Faith*, i. e. of credulity; you account for his obstinacy and universal disbelief.

These remarks on the nature and causes of incredulity we do not mention as being comprehensive of the subject. In order to account fully for this principle, we must ascribe the greatest part of its influence to the injudicious management of those who are professed instructors in the early season of life. On this branch of our subject, as being of principal importance, it is necessary that we enter with particularity.

We may observe with truth of mankind in general, that their religious sentiments are regulated in a great measure, during the whole course of their lives, by the first notions of this great subject which are impressed



fed upon their minds. From this truth it follows obviously, that certain qualities in the mind of him who is entrusted with the important charge of education, will produce either the best or the worst effects upon those whom he is employed to instruct. Consequences of the last kind arise most commonly from that enthusiastic ardour in a tutor which is known by the designation Zeal, of which we shall therefore endeavour, so far as the present point is concerned, to display the operation.

By the term Zeal is most commonly understood a passionate attachment to tenets or to doctrines of any kind, which temperate reason rejects as exceeding the medium of truth. Two ingredients appear from our account of this principle to constitute it particularly. Those are violent passions, and a weak or misguided understanding. The vehemence of the former is indicated by the extreme to which the mind is precipitated under their direction; and the comparative debility of the latter, by its implicit submission to dictates which it cannot justify nor defend. Of this ardour, to whatever object

may be directed, we must acknowledge that the influence is always pernicious. Experience however has pointed out at all times the sphere of religious inquiry, as being that wherein its effects are most conspicuous, and strongly marked. We shall endeavour to evince, that, in the present sphere, he who is zealously attached to the tenets of any sect or party whatever, will be rendered by his attachment, the promoter of that incredulity which it is his ultimate and earnest purpose to discourage and to suppress. Our observations on this head will introduce remarks on that plan of religious instruction by which effects that are so detrimental may be prevented from influencing conduct.

Of Zealots there are two classes, of whom the members adopt maxims that are diametrically opposite. The first consists of men whose religious schemes are illiberal, and whose principles are intolerant. To the last, on the contrary, they belong who glory in being released from the restraint of principles altogether, and who endeavour with their utmost power to exterminate its influence universally. Our present purpose is to show,  
that

that when men of either class are the directors of education; although they proceed in paths that are apparently opposite, yet that the points in which these terminate are nearly the same.

In the first case zeal will prompt its votary to tincture the mind which he proposeth to instruct with these narrow views, and with those absurd prejudices, which predominate in his own. With this end he will chalk out to his pupil a particular line of enquiry to which he will prescribe an inflexible adherence. He will attempt likewise to impress certain notions upon his memory, which a young man of discernment will receive perhaps at first as the best that are offered, not without some hesitation. But let us mark the consequence of this procedure. The two extremes of bigotted attachment to certain opinions of a subject, and an absolute rejection of it, run more readily into each other than we may be apt at first view to conceive. Released from a state of intellectual subjection, the man discovers at the same time that his first notions have been built upon a false foundation, and that theories of universal

versal repute have been industriously withheld from him. It is obvious, that a prejudice in favour of the latter must be the consequence of this detection. For he will judge that these must have been concealed from a well-grounded apprehension of their effects. "If, he will say very justly, the hypothesis of those authors are absurd as well as impious, why have I not been permitted to examine these as well as others of an opposite tendency which have readily been put into my hands? I have been taught principles of which I begin to call in question the stability. Let me try whether the truth of which I am in search may not be found in the examination of theories that are framed by men of liberal sentiment by their own profession, and of great ability in the general estimation."

After this manner a young man of some reflection will reason with himself on this subject. And from reasoning thus he will proceed to peruse the writings of those authors with the hope of being benefited by his research. Rejecting, therefore, his first opinions as incompetent, and unacquainted with intermediate schemes, which from the  
same

same general doctrines are rendered more consonant to truth and nature, our inexperienced inquirer falls into an approbation of plans that have a more promising aspect. He remarks that the charge of credulity is in many cases urged with truth against those who have been the first patterns of his imitation. He therefore shakes off this credulity, and resolves not to embrace any tenet that is not consonant to his ideas of fitness, and of propriety. He detects that zeal in others which has not been "according to knowledge." Far, however, from profiting by this discovery, he is carried without perceiving it to the extreme of incredulity by that passionate ardour which is the subject of his censure.

The mind in early youth is indeed naturally charmed with every plan which gives scope to the free exertion of its faculties. It finds something that is pleasing to self-love in this exaltation of reason, and gives a hearty approbation to means by which so desirable an end is accomplished. Divested therefore of his first principles, and taught by experience to avoid the extreme of superstitious credulity,

credulity, a young man discovers charms in the track that opens to him, of which perhaps, after all, the principal excellence is the novelty. Why then, it may be asked, does not this plan cease to captivate when it ceaseth to be new? I answer, because the mind receives so deep a taint from the unlimited indulgence of passion in early life, that at a later period it is unmoved by arguments of which the effect in other circumstances must have been striking and permanent.

To our remarks on the dangerous effect of a narrow and gloomy scheme of religious principles, we need not add observations on the effects that must arise from an adherence to the opposite extreme. Let us only remark, that the principal object which this comparison offers to us is, that, according to the former scheme, a man will be conducted with much pain and labour to *that point* from which by the latter he sets out in his course. For the man who, from his disapprobation of some religious principles, divests himself of all, and he who enters into life without the knowledge of such principles, are, it will be acknowledged, equally free from the restraint which they impose

impose upon others. And their actions at the period above mentioned may be equally extravagant and licentious.

A middle course, therefore, I am inclined to think, ought to be pursued with young persons, as that which will be found to have the happiest effect. This will be carried into execution most successfully by accustoming the mind in early life to examine all sides of the questions that are under its review with freedom and impartiality. The parent or tutor, who would impress a good opinion of our religion, may submit those works to consideration in the first instance, wherein the utility of Christian institutions, and the observance of Christian duties, are most strongly inculcated and enforced. By this procedure, two points of importance will be gained. The first is, that the earliest prepossession which the mind receives will be favourable to our religion. The last, which is equally important, is, that the arguments of free-thinkers will lose their principal charm at any future period, by being deprived of novelty. The man will be satisfied, by being permitted to extend his inquiries universal-

ly, that neither have his instructors adopted, nor do they require him to believe in schemes which they are afraid of submitting to examination. He will be taught to distinguish a faith that is founded on reason from that general assent without investigation which is properly characterised by the term *credulity*. Thus therefore he will be provided of the means of defending himself on that side on which the advocates of infidelity make their attack with the greatest prospect of success.

We cannot leave this interesting branch of our subject, without making another observation, which appears naturally to arise from it. The remark is, that, among the questions that are submitted to the examination of a young person, a judicious instructor will not introduce in the first place points of faith, modes of worship, or in general, speculative doctrines, to the comprehension of which enlarged views, considerable knowledge, and powers of entering into an argumentative process, are necessary. The perfections and providence of God, and the various relations in which his creatures stand to him, are the first



first objects which a contemplative mind will view with some attention. And such a tutor will choose to follow the choice of his pupil in the first instance, rather than to prescribe to it. There can be no danger in explaining and in recommending Christian doctrines on those important subjects, because it is acknowledged that they are rational. Neither can any just exception lie against sanctions, whether peculiar or not to the Christian scheme, which require the belief of those truths, or which enjoin their observance. The proof of these points will be introduced in a subsequent part of this work, wherein we will resume the subject of religious education.

We have now entered at very considerable length into the nature of the charge of credulity, and have endeavoured to follow its effects up to their original causes. Let us now, in the prosecution of our general plan, consider the use which our modern free-thinkers make of this charge, in order to recommend themselves and their doctrines to popular esteem.

We must go back as far as the days of Celsus to find the time when this plea was first urged to the prejudice of the Christian cause. It is by this sagacious, although inveterate adversary, that *the ball is thrown out*, which his humble imitators of later times have *banded about* to such excellent purpose. With the purpose of depreciating Christianity, he expatiates with much art and apparent propriety upon the use that ought at all times to be made of rational investigation. After this exordium, he proceeds to compare Christians who he says are *αλογως πιστευοντες*, “unreasonably credulous,” to the simple and illiterate vulgar, whom a few designing villains led about at their festivals, by pretending to make Hecate and other demons pass before them\*. He adds, that some Christians are such enemies to all inquiry, that they will neither give nor receive a reason of the faith that is in them. The following rule therefore among them is proverbial. “Make no inquiry; but believe. Faith will do your business at once.” It is likewise, he says, a common expression among them, that we ought “to shun the wisdom of men, and to

\* ΟΡΙΓ. κατὰ ΚΕΛΣ. Τομ. Α. p. 8.

“ imitate

“ imitate their folly \*.” Again, he reproacheth the Christians by mentioning the conduct of Plato. This philosopher, he tells us, assigns a reason of his faith in a matter of which he says *οτι ρητον οκ εστιν*, that it cannot be explained. He acts in this manner, according to our author, that he may not be thought to have adopted any tenet irrationally. Origen remarks very justly, that the ultimate purpose of these observations is to expose the doctrine of implicit faith. He takes off their force, by saying that the apostle Paul was of the same opinion with Celsus on this subject; for that he likewise reprehends those who were too easy of belief. “ If ye had not believed “ too rashly †,” &c. Such is the *ball* as it was first set in motion. Attend now to the champion of the same cause in modern days,

*qui densis ictibus, heros*

*Creber, utraque manu pulsatur, versaturque.* VIRG.

Among them, it is with regret that we assign the first place to the ingenious and spirited

\* Alluding most probably to what is said, 1. Cor. iii 19. That the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.

† Id. Τομ. 5. p. 281.

Voltaire. His observation on the credulity of Christians, signified under the inauspicious term FAITH, is the same as that of his master Celsus. He introduceth it, however, with much more address, after having enumerated some hackneyed objections to the truth of Christianity, raised, as he says, by the learned.

In vain, says he, have those men of erudition been wondering for so many ages at the silence of Josephus respecting the birth and actions of Christ. Of one short passage that relates to this subject in his works the interpolation is universally acknowledged \*. In

\* Surely this author must have been very ill informed when he writes in this manner concerning a passage which is found in all the manuscripts of Josephus without exception. If his affirmation was founded in the objections which Tannegui le Fevre and other authors have made to its authenticity, he ought at the same time to have acknowledged, that both Jerom and Eusebius among the first Christian writers maintain it to be genuine. To give up a passage as being interpolated, against the authenticity of which presumptive evidence can only be opposed to ocular testimony in its favour, would be the height of folly. *Vide Taneg. Fab. Diatrib. Flav. Joseph. de Jes. Christ. Testim. pass. Jerom de Scriptor. Euseb. Eccles. Hist. Lib. 1. cap. 11. &c. Daubuz. de Testim. Flav. Joseph. &c.*

vain

vain do those learned persons object to the prodigies of darkness, &c. which happened at the time of our Saviour's death, that they are not recorded by any contemporary Roman historian. In vain have they found difficulties in the evangelical history. And to no purpose do they urge objections to the record of miracles. All these cavils of the learned are effectually silenced by FAITH, the merit of which is enhanced by those difficulties \*.

What does this lively writer mean by the farcaistical insinuation which concludes this paragraph? It is not surely his purpose to maintain that no advocate of our religion has attempted to account for these formidable circumstances from principles which merit attention. Even upon this supposition, it will be difficult to vindicate his conduct in the present instance. For, after having enumerated so many seeming objections, he ought in justice to his subject to have acknowledged, that certain men had endeavoured to offer satisfactory solutions, by whatever contemptuous epithet he might have chosen to stigmatise their attempt. But it is clear, that

\* *Diction. Histor.*

this was not his purpose. What then did he propose? He meant to represent the religion of Jesus as being founded upon the most absurd principles, by urging the charge of credulity against Christians. And his view must have been to expose both this religion and its followers to the ridicule of young and inexperienced inquirers.

Mark, my young friends, the circumstances which are brought together in order to effectuate this end! The authors of those objections are *les savantes*, the learned, the profound philosophers, or, in the language of a zealous member of the party, "the profane critics, "whose examination always precedes, and "sometimes checks their assent \*." The objections themselves, apparently levelled against points of the greatest importance, have never yet been obviated. But the Christian religion is founded on faith; *i. e.* on no principles at all. Its disciples are credulous fools, who can and will believe any proposition whatever. They are simpletons whom you

\* In this deplorable state of insanity the reader will find that Dr Clark, Mr Woolaston, and the late President Forbes lived, according to Lord Bolingbroke. See his *Works*, vol. 5. p. 474. 523.

may persuade that two and two make six. And at best they are madmen *quoad hoc*, although, like other lunatics, they are able to talk rationally on the common subjects of conversation.

Let it not be said that we have exaggerated the matter in this account of it. For, if a real distinction can be made in any instance betwixt faith and reason, he who believes doctrines which are wholly unsupported by rational evidence, is indeed the madman of Bolingbroke, who, instead of being classed with Locke and Woolaston, ought to be consigned over to a dark room and a keeper.

When we hear one of those authors upon the charge of credulity, and upon the doctrine of faith, we may be said to hear the whole tribe, who are in general the faithful echoes of each other. It must however be acknowledged of our English historian above mentioned, that, if either or both the former have been his models in the present instance, he has the honour of improving upon his originals, so far as their accusation admits of improvement. Speaking of mysteries which surpass the limits of understanding, "It is,

says Mr Gibbon, this deep impression of supernatural truths which has been so much celebrated under the name of *Faith*: a state of mind described as the surest pledge of the divine favour, and of future felicity, and recommended as the first, and perhaps the *only merit* of a Christian \*.” The observation of the Pagan author is general and unappropriated. The remark of the French critic is rendered more particular and more apposite by an enumeration of plausible circumstances, which however have often been urged as rational objections. But this gentleman “lays the axe at once to the root of the tree: “and by defining Faith to be the supernatural impression of supernatural truths, or “to be constituted by a belief founded not “on argument, but an impression of mysteries that exceed the limits of understanding,” his charge of insanity becomes general against the whole Christian world, of which it comprehends every individual without exception. What man of intelligence therefore is there, who is not anxiously solicitous to be released from a community branded with such appellations by authors

\* Vol. 1. p. 572.



who stand high in his esteem! And what objects of imitation must the sentiments and the conduct of that man be, whose mind, guided by the cool dictates of reason, is unsusceptible of that impression by which propositions that are at the same time irrational and incomprehensible are received as a revelation from the Deity!

The distinction of faith from reason, supported in the preceding instances by simple affirmation, our noble author attempts to confirm beyond question by an induction of facts. Disdaining to use the shafts of ridicule, he exhibits the whole charge in the form of a simple demonstration. "Natural law," he tells us, "is founded on reason, but "Christianity in faith; and faith proceeds "from GRACE; and whether a man shall "have grace or not, depends not on him \*." What shall we say of a champion, who lays about him with so much vehemence, and who strikes the ball with so vigorous an effort! shall we say that, in the present instance, *himself* is the ENTELLUS, and his stroke the

\* *Bolingbroke's works*, vol. 5. p. 93.

*denfus ictus* of the divine poet above quoted? Alas! unhappy votaries of an exploded religion, miserable victims of so powerful an adversary; whether will ye fly for protection from an enemy armed with the thunder of Jupiter, who extinguisheth your fires \*; storms your enchanted castles \*; strikes your defenders in his wrath with madness †; and, in the midst of this universal confusion, is himself governed by a spirit of docility ‡, by the love of nature, and by the simplicity of truth §!

But let us drop the form of exclamation, and adopt that of argument. Let us examine the parts of his proposition, or rather the ramifications of his genealogical tree. Thus then it stands. “Natural, *i. e.* rational law is founded in reason. Christian, *i. e.* unnatural or irrational law, is founded on faith. Faith is the daughter of grace, and GRACE is an

\* Breaking the charm, the enchanted castle, the steepy rock, the burning lake will disappear. *Lett. on Study and Retirement.*

† *Bolingbroke, vol. 5. ubi supra.*

‡ *Id. vol. 3. p. 320.*

§ *Id. ibid. p. 330.*

*ignis*

*ignis fatuus*, a Will o' th' Wisp, whom you may chase, if you will, through a quagmire, and be soufed over head and ears for your pains.

Will it be said that this ludicrous manner is ill-adapted to so serious, and so important a subject? Let us observe, in reply, that when we consider the high pretensions of our modern Deists to philosophical accuracy, and in particular the unnatural distinction which they attempt to make betwixt faith and reason in the matters of religion, as means by whose influence an inexperienced mind is tinctured with early prejudice in behalf of infidelity; we know no better method of defeating their purpose, than that of exposing such an attempt to the contempt and to the ridicule of those upon whom it might otherwise establish a lasting and dangerous impression.

After what hath been said on the imputation of credulity, as it is enforced against Christians by their adversaries, an enlargement at any length would be deemed superfluous. The principal secret of the art of those adversaries lies in the management  
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of this which is their great offensive weapon. And to point out the purposes to which they have applied it would be to transcribe a large part of their writings. We shall therefore dispatch this part of the subject in a few sentences; that, in the prosecution of our general plan, we may consider the foundation of the charge, with a view to expose and to prevent its effects.

In the spirit then of our noble author, another advocate of the same cause will inform you, my young reader, with much solemnity, and in very explicit terms, that “our  
“ most holy religion is founded on *faith*, and  
“ *not on reason* \*.” A second cannot be reconciled to Christianity, because its disciples have not been brought to give up “historical faith,” as he terms it †. A third outrageous adversary, fired with the “*dementia quoad hoc*” to some purpose, will tell you, that “the gospels are full of Gulliverian tales  
“ that never had a being; that there is not  
“ one word of truth in Jesus’s life taken literally; but that the whole is emblematic

\* *Hume’s Essay on Miracles*, a fine.

† *Resurrect. considered*, p. 83.

“tical of his influence on the soul \*.” The question arising from this representation is obvious. If the history itself is of such a nature, what are those who believe it?

Is it then true that the Christian religion is founded upon a faith of the kind above mentioned? Are its professors really such credulous fools as to be imposed upon by a few silly tales, calculated rather for the amusement of children, than for any highly useful and important purpose? and does the impression of supernatural truths upon the minds of Christians supersede the effect of rational investigation? It is in the examination of these questions that the inefficacy of the charge of credulity will be rendered conspicuous. But as this examination will open a subject of which it is necessary to treat at some length, we shall appropriate the subsequent section to this branch of our inquiry.

\* *Woolaston.*

## S E C T. VII.

*Of Faith as being founded upon rational Evidence.*

WHAT general idea, it will be asked, do you form of the term *faith*, which has given rise to an imputation so detrimental to the cause of Christianity? Let us remark, that under this general designation, we usually, although very improperly, comprehend two acts of the mind which differ widely from each other. One is, that general and superficial assent which it gives to certain propositions, received as being true, without much examination. The other is a belief arising from clear and satisfactory evidence, and obtained either by an accurate investigation of the object, or by having contemplated it as connected with other points or tenets, of the use and importance of which the mind has gained the fullest conviction. No great share of discernment is requisite to comprehend, that an indulgence of the former kind will give just occasion to charge with

with credulity, a man who may possess the best understanding. For it will be said with truth, that of such understanding, he makes in this instance no proper use. On the contrary, it is equally plain, that this charge cannot be adduced with propriety in the latter case, even although the man should have formed a wrong judgment, because he will be able to evince, that his choice has been guided by the apparently superior weight of argument.

It may perhaps be said after all, that he may be denominated credulous, who believes in extraordinary representations of any kind, without having gained such evidence as men in general would deem to be adequate and satisfactory. To the propriety of this observation we shall readily subscribe, when the previous question is finally settled, viz. what degree of proof in cases of the present kind, men in general will acknowledge to be adequate and satisfactory. To adjust this point exactly, will be found a matter of some difficulty. We have already seen, that philosophers differ widely from each other, and indeed from the whole unenlightened part of

the species, in their notions concerning the nature of this evidence. Of those, one will tell you that it is possible, and another that it is impossible to establish the truth of propositions, and to ascertain the reality of events that are contrary to experience. With respect to readers of another class, the motives by which their decision is influenced have been mentioned so particularly, as renders an enlargement at present superfluous. We must therefore leave this point to be determined by the individual according to his best judgment, and shall proceed directly with our subject.

It is by taking the term FAITH in the first acceptation, that the adversaries of Christianity are enabled to make a nominal distinction between this principle, or *grace*, and the proof that is constituted by rational inquiry. But in no sense whatever can this distinction be acknowledged to have propriety. For it is not merely from the nature of the propositions believed, however absurd or contradictory, that the imputation of credulity takes its rise. It respects, in a principal manner, the examination as being more  
or



or less accurate, of which this belief is the consequence. As justly, therefore, as that man may be charged with the *dementia quoad hoc*, whose belief of marvellous or of contradictory theories is the result of an impression by which reason is set aside; as justly may he be charged with the grossest credulity, whose assent to truths of the most essential importance is influenced by no rational principles. Faith therefore properly signifies a belief or persuasion dictated by motives of powerful efficacy. And the hope of the Christian is pronounced by one of his best guides, to be then only well founded, when he can confirm it by reason.

Let us bring these observations to the test of example. You ask a Christian upon what foundation he builds his faith, or his conviction of the truth of his religion. He will answer readily, that he believes this religion to be of divine authority, because its doctrines and precepts are in his opinion adapted to promote those purposes which a Being of consummate wisdom and benevolence would propose to accomplish by revelation. He is satisfied with the external evidences of

this revelation, because he remarks, that the predictions of the Old Testament prophets have been verified by corresponding events : And that the miracles of the new dispensation, wrought in confirmation of doctrines that are worthy of God, are authenticated by clear and by unexceptionable testimony.

All good, methinks I hear an adversary reply. But you must know that certain very strong objections have been urged against the authority and the proofs of your religion. The faith of a Christian may be denominated so far *meritorious*, as it eludes the force of those objections ; and, as it acknowledgeth that evidence to be satisfactory in one case, which in another the mind would reject as being unequal and improper. This I know has often been said. But by what commission ? It is certainly what logicians term a *petitio principii*, where the disputed point is taken for granted. You, the Christian may reply, profess to be a man of reason, and a philosopher. Now I will be glad to know, upon what grounds you pronounce so dogmatically concerning my faith, as being determined in the examination of a matter

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ter that is highly important, and deeply interesting by motives which I would have rejected as frivolous, in a case of inferior consequence, and of a less interesting nature. This is an unwarranted liberty which you have no right to assume. I have considered your objections, and judge them to be inefficacious. And I have reason to retort your accusations of credulity, and of prejudice.

Thus far then faith and reason co-operate to the accomplishment of a general purpose in religious inquiry; and it would appear to be an unnatural, as well as an impracticable attempt to separate either from its companion. But the great charge against Christianity remains to be obviated. I mean, that respecting its mysterious doctrines or tenets, to the comprehension of which the human intellect is confessedly inadequate. Those being revealed as points of faith, properly so called, render the imputation of credulity just and appropriated.

In answer to this charge that hath been urged so strenuously against the Christian religion,

religion, it is not our present intention to enter into any minute investigation of principles. We shall however make two observations on this subject, with the purpose of repelling an accusation thus particularly enforced. Of those, the first respects the meaning of the term mystery or mysterious, as having been misapplied in the case under our present consideration. Our second remark is founded upon the evidence by which the doctrines of our religion that fall within the import of this term is supported, as being full, and appropriated to the nature of the objects.

The term mysterious is applicable, with propriety, to a doctrine or to a transaction, the nature of which, or the mode of operation, we are unable perfectly to comprehend. This designation, on the other hand, is applied with impropriety to any scheme, containing absurd and contradictory principles: Because reason, upon which conviction may be impressed in behalf of credible propositions, must reject the incongruous without hesitation.

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In the first and proper sense of the epithet mysterious, we acknowledge that it belongs to certain tenets or maxims, the nature of which we do not thoroughly understand: Or to actions wherein we are unable to trace the mode of operation. But if we are to reject every position as incredible, to which objections of this kind may be made, the sphere of human investigation will become contracted indeed. Let us try an example.

Among the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, no single tenet appears to have been considered by the Pagan world as being more absurd than that of a *resurrection from the dead* \*. Against this transaction the objections above mentioned may be urged with much force. For neither can we understand what will be the nature of those bodies, the properties of which must differ so essentially from the present, nor have we any conception of the *modus operandi* by which so new and so astonishing a revolution will be brought to take place. But our ignorance of these circumstances, which renders a superior degree of evidence necessary to ascertain their reality,

\* Acts xvii. 32.

cannot surely operate against all proof whatever. The works of nature abound with phenomena of which the nature and effects are to us incomprehensible. But are we therefore to deny that these have existence? or can we credit the testimony of sense with respect to this matter in one case, without acknowledging the possible existence of phenomena that are not more unaccountable in another?

Thus far then reason considers this doctrine as a possible effect of the cause to which it is ascribed. But you still object, that, in this mysterious and unaccountable transaction, you can form no idea of the means employed to effectuate the ultimate purpose. This, you observe, is not the case with respect to the external appearances of nature. These we refer in general to certain established laws of which the effect and permanency are confirmed by experience. We acknowledge the truth of this last observation. But many examples may be adduced wherein our confessed ignorance of means forms no objection against their end or purpose, although this purpose should not be exposed to cognizance of sense. You know not in what manner  
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your own mind operates upon your corporeal organs. But do you therefore deny that there is any such intelligence? You are ignorant concerning the time and manner of its union with a material vehicle. But does it therefore follow, that this coalescence is impossible? If this consequence does not take place, we ask farther, whether the same Being who fashioned and who animated the human frame originally, may not raise it from the dust in higher perfection, and may not produce an union never afterwards to be dissolved.

From the possible existence of these circumstances once ascertained, it will follow, that a probability, or even that certainty with respect to this doctrine may be obtained, when *adequate evidence* is brought to confirm its truth. Implicit faith therefore is here immediately set aside. And the question to be resolved is, what proof is equal to a purpose of so singular a nature, and so contrary, as a late author would say, to experience. The natural reply to this demand, perhaps, is the following. The doctrine of a general resurrection derives all its authority from revelation.

The proof, therefore, by which its truth is established, must be drawn from the character, circumstances, and actions of the person by whom it is revealed, and above all from the general design and tendency of his other religious institutions. What proof then do you demand of those essential articles? An examination of this question in all its extent would lead us from the professed purpose of the present inquiry. We shall therefore just remark, that the answer to it is to be found in the prophecies that announced the birth and actions of the Messiah; in the miracles of which he was the author; in his moral conduct, unblemished in every circumstance; and in the tenor of his institutions, tending to promote the best interest of mankind. Those four requisitions, by the concurrence of which a possible circumstance is rendered the object of rational belief, become the ground of a faith that is founded, not upon impression, but upon argument. Granting Christianity to be out of the question, the requisitions above mentioned are those which we would wish to meet in the author of a revelation from the supreme Being. And he who proves that they centered in the Author of



of our religion, brings an evidence of its divinity that is full, and adapted to the nature of the subject.

Thus much we thought it necessary to observe upon the first and proper sense of the term *mysterious* in its present application. With respect to the second meaning of this epithet, by which it is supposed to imply something that is obviously repugnant to truth, and to the first principles of reason, the designation above mentioned is misapplied in this sense. Such a doctrine ought not to be denominated mysterious, but absurd and contradictory; and against him who should profess to believe it, the charge of madness would be brought with much more propriety, than the accusation of credulity. Yet he who is conversant in the writings of deistical authors must have remarked, that those points, in the belief of which the faith of the Christian is said to be meritorious, are generally supposed to be of this last kind. And from this source is derived the ridicule which certain shrewd innuendos to the present purpose fail not to excite.

To every accusation, therefore, of a belief that is determined by impression, the reply is at hand. The faith of a Christian is so far a rational principle, as it is determined by superior weight of evidence, after a close and dispassionate examination has been carried on. Even those parts of the general plan of revelation which may most properly be denominated the objects of a Christian's faith, because they may not lie so level as others to the line of his understanding, he is yet induced by proportioned evidence to think worthy of credibility. For that doctrine which, when detached from its connection, he might reject as improbable; yet, when it is contemplated by him as being one part of a great system that is calculated in his estimation to promote purposes of universal utility, he receives with confidence and with gratitude. It forms in his judgement the part of a whole, of which he acknowledgeth the original to be divine.

We have entered into this subject at some length; because, when the invidious, and, as we have endeavoured to show, the ill-founded distinction betwixt faith and reason is removed,

ved, one of the most powerful causes of the growth of infidelity is deprived of its efficacy.

But, in this inquiry, let us remember that we lie open, in the judgment of some men, to the accusation of having confounded religious with philosophical evidence, the distinct provinces of which it hath been found necessary to determine with some precision. The philosopher, it will be said, who makes reason professedly his guide, submits every step of his process to the cognisance of this supreme judge, which examines with close attention the principles leading to his conclusion. But with respect to *religious proof*, the matter, by your own account, is wholly different. Circumstances are here taken *in cumulo*; and a proof is made out, not from an enumeration of particulars leading to an ultimate decision, but from certain facts whose connection with the principal point is less discernible, or from the general tendency of a scheme of which it is acknowledged that some parts are exceptionable. That this subject may be canvassed in all its extent, it may be proper to distinguish these two kinds of evidence

evidence from each other in such a manner as that the reader may judge concerning their force and propriety from comparison. With this view, we shall sum up our remarks on faith as being founded upon reasonable motives, with some observations on the nature and upon the comparative excellence of religious and of philosophical probation.

Moral evidence is of three kinds, which may be specified by the terms *direct*, *presumptive*, and *circumstantial*. By direct proof, I understand that in which the relation of every intermediate part to some ultimate end is clearly discernible, and where the mind, without deviating from its final purpose, goes regularly forward to its accomplishment. By presumptive, I mean to point out that species of evidence, which, respecting things whose reality cannot perfectly be ascertained, yet throws as much light upon the subject as it is calculated to receive. Lastly, I make use of the term circumstantial, to denote that evidence wherein the mind, being satisfied with the general tenour and tendency of a whole scheme, and with the persons by whom it is promulgated, acknowledgeth the truth of cer-  
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tain possible circumstances, from the connection in which they stand with others, that are derived from the same original, and are enforced by the same authority.

Of these species of evidence, the first is employed in the proof of every general proposition, of which the truth is established by a clear and accurate induction of particulars leading to a general conclusion. The second relates principally to historical narration; and is then perfect, when events or transactions which have been obscured by chronological mistakes, perplexed by interfering relations, or casually invalidated during the succession of ages, are cleared up, and are placed in the most favourable point of view by a judicious selection and arrangement of facts. Of the last kind is the probation of all general hypotheses, consisting of various and apparently dissimilar parts, to some of which a critical examination will suggest objections that can only be removed by an estimate of the nature, the excellence, and the tendency of all.

Of evidence thus branched out into different kinds, we may perhaps appropriate,  
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with justice, the first to philosophy, the second to history, and the last to the doctrines of revealed religion. Let us remark here, that, when we mention circumstantial proof as being particularly applicable to Christian institutions, we mean not to exclude the direct probation as being inadmissible. On the contrary, we have endeavoured to prove, in a preceding section, that the truth of this religion, as a revelation from God, may be evinced as directly from an examination of its general principles, as of any philosophical proposition whatever. It is to the complicated parts of this great plan, as being comprehended with more or less facility, that we consider this circumstantial proof as adapted. The conviction produced by it, when compleat, is likewise perhaps as satisfactory and permanent, as that which is gained by the first, or indeed by any method whatever.

To this observation it will be objected, that external circumstances cannot confirm any truth so fully as an induction of particulars, placing it clearly before the mind, and rendering it distinctly comprehended. The  
reply

reply to this objection depends upon that which is given to two questions that are connected with the subject. The first respects the proof brought to evince the truth and importance of these external circumstances ; and the second, the tendency of truths supported by the same authority as the former, and derived from the same original, to effectuate purposes of general emolument to mankind.

But we comprehend, it will be said, certain moral precepts, and we are perfectly convinced of their fitness to produce the proposed effect. Are we therefore to adopt maxims or doctrines which we do not understand, and with the fitness of which we are not well acquainted, into our system of principles ? And are we to receive these as being supported by evidence equally satisfactory as that above mentioned ? Permit me in this case to have recourse to an illustration.

Although unacquainted with the mechanism of a watch, you are yet fully satisfied that this little machine has been constructed for the purpose of measuring time ; and you

admire it upon the whole as a finished specimen of mechanical ingenuity. Upon seeing, however, the various parts of this complicated production scattered promiscuously upon a table, you are at a loss to conceive the purposes towards which some of these will bear application. You readily conceive indeed that motion is communicated from the spring, because when it is compressed, you remark that it possesseth a certain elastic power, by which it is impelled to extend itself on all sides. But it is otherwise with certain little wheels and pivots, of whose aptitude to the purpose of measuring time you can form no distinct idea. You are therefore in doubt whether you ought or ought not to consider these as being parts of the machine. By what authority is your belief to be determined in this matter? Can you have any better or more decisive testimony than the word of the maker or constructor of this little portable engine, granting that you are convinced of his having no design to deceive you?

Let us apply this illustration to the present subject. The proof that Christian doctrines



trines and institutions tend in general to promote the best ends, is as direct and as strictly philosophical as any evidence can be. When the following simple question is proposed to you : Whether or not is a religion in which the love of God and of man are enforced throughout, calculated to render men happy or miserable ? you are no more at a loss to pronounce upon the tendency of this religion to produce happiness, than you are to know that a watch is constructed for the purpose of measuring time. Should you be called upon to prove this truth by argument, you can resolve the proposition into its constituent parts. You can show in what manner a sense of obligation to the Supreme Being, the practice of justice, charity, humanity to each other ; of temperance, chastity, circumspection with respect to individuals, tend to promote the happiness of the community, and of the persons who compose it. But, in the theory of the philosopher, you expect that this direct method of probation will be carried into every part without exception, unless where the maxims are self-evident. Let his discoveries likewise be never so excellent, you demand that, by being

levelled to the line of your understanding, they should bear, upon every occasion, intrinsic marks of their human original. On the other hand, in the more extensive range of Christian institutions, not only are certain positive observances required, of which reason would not have pointed out the necessity, but you are likewise informed concerning the resurrection of the dead. And you find facts and circumstances recorded in the sacred writings, which cannot be supported by the direct evidence employed to illustrate the truth of a philosophical proposition. These, in the terms of our illustration, are the wheels and pivots of the little mechanical engine, or, in language more adapted to the subject, the objects of this great and comprehensive system, concerning whose aptitude to a certain purpose you are in doubt, by what method is this doubt to be removed?

Your first question on this subject will probably be the following. Are those doctrines which appear to be superinduced into this scheme, promulgated by the same authority with the other parts of it, so as that all are rendered equally the objects of belief?

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When this question is answered in the affirmative, you next inquire, whether such arbitrary precepts and points of faith are either unworthy of the Supreme Being ; or, whether they contain any thing which reason rejects as being absurd and contradictory ? When you are satisfied with respect to this matter likewise, it remains only farther, that you should carry your inquiry into the general evidence of revelation both external and internal, in order to ascertain the divine original of these doctrines. Your faith, when these purposes are accomplished, will be as much founded upon argument as that of the philosopher can be in any hypothesis whereof the truth is illustrated by the simplest induction. In both cases, you will remark, that the proof of the principal point is direct. Only, in the scheme of a religion professedly communicated by inspiration, we meet with ordinances and with institutions which reason would not have discovered to be necessary ; and which therefore one purpose of this revelation most probably was to promulgate. Our belief of them, however, is *strictly rational*, as being founded upon the general

general evidence by means of which the whole is acknowledged to be divine.

Thus we have endeavoured to evince the futility of that distinction betwixt faith and reason, which our modern deists attempt to establish, as being that separation wherein the charge of credulity may be considered as originating. And it hath been proved, we hope, in a satisfactory manner, that in no view whatever of the religion of Jesus, can it be said to demand a faith to which the reproachful epithet *meritorious* can be applied, as indicating a triumph over the noblest of intellectual faculties. We have stated the comparison betwixt religious and philosophical evidence, that every man may judge for himself concerning the validity of each, and may be assured, that the faith of a Christian, and the conviction of a philosopher, are equally to be established by rational investigation.

You therefore, my young readers, whom esteem of the philosophical character has misled into an injudicious imitation, and whose infidelity has its rise in the persuasion  
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that implicit faith is required of the Christian, who lies open to the charge of thinking or of acting irrationally, will have perused the preceding observations with some emolument, if they have convinced you that the various doctrines of Christianity may be defended upon philosophical principles, and that the distinctions by which you have been induced to form a contrary judgment are imaginary and useless.

## S E C T. VIII.

*Of the effect of abuse and ridicule respecting the clerical character.*

**W**E have now considered at considerable length those causes of modern infidelity which respect the Christian religion in general, according to the representation of its adversaries, or which have for their objects its peculiar doctrines and its positive institutions. An extensive field, it must be acknowledged, has, in the course of this inquiry, been opened to our observation ; and we have endeavoured to divest of their efficacy, motives of powerful energy, when enforced by eloquent declamation, to impress  
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upon the mind an early, lasting, and dangerous prepossession in behalf of deistical opinions.

But whatever effect we may ascribe to these causes of infidelity, they are not singly equal to the purpose which they are employed to bring about. For a little reflection will show us, that the efficacy of pleas employed in behalf of our religion by its professional advocates, depends in a great degree upon our judgment of their sincerity, and upon our general estimation of the character by which they profess to be distinguished. To depreciate therefore this character, and to render those who support it hateful or ridiculous, is to do an essential injury to the cause of religion itself. For no deep knowledge of human nature is required to convince us, that with the major part of mankind, he who can render the sincerity of his antagonist problematical, although by evidence merely presumptive, will very effectually invalidate the arguments by which his cause should be supported.

Convinced of this truth, the patrons of infidelity

fidelity leave no mean unattempted to injure the cause of Christianity, by attacking the character of its *official* defenders. We propose to confirm this affirmation in the present section, by placing in a proper light the artful misrepresentation employed by them with this purpose, and by explaining the causes to which we may ascribe its effect.

Two methods of powerful and universal influence are employed by the professed instructors of mankind to impress their opinions. One is, that of placing certain tenets or characters in a ludicrous point of view, so as to excite the shame of acknowledgment, in certain instances, wherein it is not perhaps practicable to eradicate conviction. The other and more dangerous expedient is that of exposing whatever is apparently exceptionable in either of these in such a manner, by affirmation and by specious argument, as may render both the objects of rational disapprobation. Of those methods the former is most commonly ineffectual, when unaccompanied by the last : From both, when artfully and judiciously applied, the effect arising is of the most pernicious tendency.

And when the character of a society is placed by such means in any disagreeable point of view, this effect will obtain more universally, as the principle upon which they operate is, as we shall see afterwards, the desire of imitation.

Our application of these remarks to the present subject, therefore, will lead us to point out the lineaments or features of the ministerial character that admit most easily of ludicrous misrepresentation ; to examine the parts or qualities of which a very unfavourable view may be exhibited by plausible reasoning, affirmation, or comparison ; to specify as nearly as possible the effect of each ; and to exemplify our observations by passages selected from the writings of the most celebrated advocates of infidelity, of which we shall endeavour to expose the irony, and to refute the reasoning or the assertion.

We may remark, as an observation suggested by the first part of our subject, that among the diversity of human characters, those are most susceptible of ironical misrepresentation which are distinguished as being  
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serious, sedate, and contemplative. They who profess to think freely upon all topics, and to whose actions the charge of levity may be applicable as corresponding to their opinions, are yet less the objects of ridicule than those whose principles and whose conduct are more exempted from censure. For while men of the first class pass without animadversion through life, as gay, thoughtless fellows, who give no real offence to society; the profession and deportment of the others expose them to obloquy and to sarcastical remark. Religionists of all denominations are comprised in the last order of men; and the ridicule cast upon them is heightened in proportion to that real or apparent disparity which is supposed to take place betwixt their principles in any particular instance and their practice.

He who takes a general view of mankind, as beings who derive pain or pleasure from certain acquired qualifications, will perhaps be of opinion, that the disadvantages attendant on the acquisition of knowledge are greater both in number and in degree than the benefits which may be said to arise from

it. The truth of this observation will be owned, when it is considered, that to this acquisition the qualities that constitute the *Man of the World* are most commonly sacrificed. An union of both is not indeed impossible : But experience must convince us, that it is rarely to be met with,

It is true indeed, that in the pride of science men are apt to speak slightly of certain endowments as being superficial embellishments, subservient to no valuable purpose, or at least to none by which the time and attention of their owners are compensated. But an assertion so ill founded will be retracted, when we view the characters in which these qualifications are conspicuous as objects of universal imitation, and such on the other hand which are deficient in them, as exposed to disapprobation and contempt. By placing the principal ingredients of both characters in opposition to each other, the preceding observations will most properly be illustrated.

We generally suppose, that those persons who are distinguished by their knowledge  
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of men and of things, have superadded to their natural talents certain accomplishments of great importance, which can only be gained in a free and universal intercourse with mankind. From this source is derived that self command by which a man is present to himself upon every emergency, and is able to think and to speak in the most perilous circumstances with cool and deliberate recollection. Hence likewise proceeds that knowledge of resources when recourse to them is rendered necessary, which men even of inventive talents that have been confined within the pale of speculative investigation, must be unable to discover. To this intercourse we must ascribe in the same manner that disengaged and easy address which establisheth a pleasing and instantaneous prepossession in behalf of him who hath acquired this excellence. Lastly, when men thus accomplished are judged to have improved their experience by solid and comprehensive information, we expect from them the indications of a noble expansion of heart, of liberal and benevolent sentiments; and, in general, of such propensities which are most estimable and attractive.

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To the qualifications that are thus gained, or at least that are improved to the utmost by the knowledge of mankind, when we oppose the deportment and disposition which study and retirement tend to form, and to call out into exercise, the contrast is, no doubt, so striking as naturally to be fertile of ridicule. In truth, that combination of pride and ignorance, of awkwardness and presumption, of arrogance and obstinacy, of affectation and vanity by which the *mere scholar* is most commonly characterised, forms an exhibition of which it is hard to say whether it is more the object of derision or of disgust. Add to this intellectual portrait an emaciated figure, that, crawling from its study, or rather from its sepulchral monument, "strewn with learned dust, walks an "object new beneath the sun;" and the description is rendered perfectly ludicrous. Did we say of this character only that it is ludicrous? There is, in fact, no occasion for the poignant irony of the satirist to place it in this point of view. It were well if the "*quatis populum risu*," was the sole effect produced by the view of this motely animal. But reflection will show, that, far  
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from being satisfied with laughing at this oddity, our prejudice is carried from the man himself to the tenets or principles which he maintains, and that our solicitude to shun the most distant mark of resemblance to the manners, or to the sentiments of such a man, is proportioned to our desire in the former instance to become imitators of both. The cause of this conduct obviously is, that, with the idea of a man whose life hath passed in certain solitary occupations, we are apt to associate, although very unjustly, that of gloomy, contracted, and often of misanthropical opinions. To these likewise we add the notion of tenets not merely deficient from the want of experience, but absurd at least, if not pernicious, and which it is at all times difficult, if not impossible to carry into practice.

But the mind, it will be said, is misled in making this estimation which is certainly erroneous. For however unfavourable the occupations of the contemplative life may be to manners, and to external deportment, yet reason forbids us to form a similar judgment with respect to their influence on theory, and

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on opinion. It says, on the contrary, that he whose attention has been invariably directed to one line of inquiry, must have proceeded in it to greater length, and is most probably qualified to speak with more propriety concerning the objects that occur in it than those whose studies and whose occupations have been more widely diffused. Granted. But are the opinions of men in general dictated by *reason* on this subject? So far we will venture to affirm is this from being the case, that no just estimate of the motives to action can be formed unless when we include in it certain external and in themselves perhaps frivolous circumstances, as causes in which conduct as well as opinion is found in many instances to originate. Neither are these circumstances to be considered as operating only upon the less enlightened part of the species. Attention will convince us, that even the best education is insufficient to counteract their influence. For it will place before us examples of men whose cultivated understandings are impressed *in reality* by vulgar prejudices, from the power of which *in imagination* they are wholly exempted.

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There is, it must be confessed, something irresistible in the popular estimation of certain characters, betwixt which characters; and tenets, or actions that are false or reprehensible, we are apt at all times to establish an imaginary connection. Hence it happens that our unfavourable notion of a few individuals impresseth upon the mind a corresponding idea of the society of which they are members. Descending in the same manner from generals to particulars, we are ready at other times, from having obtained a bad notion of the purpose for which a society was instituted, to judge improperly concerning the intentions and the motives of those who compose it. We make this remark at present, principally for the benefit of young readers; who cannot be taught too early to lay aside as much as possible every personal consideration, *i. e.* whatever respects station, deportment, occupation, when they are examining subjects of acknowledged importance, and are weighing the force of comparative evidence. He indeed who is solicitous to obtrude ideas of this kind upon the mind of his readers, is most commonly sensible of the weakness of his cause, as in conversation,

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that

that man is always judged to have taken the worst side, who first descends to personal invective.

It hath been already remarked, that men of sedate and of contemplative dispositions, not only afford fairer marks to the shafts of ridicule than those whose manners and sentiments are characterised by levity, but that religionists of all denominations are particularly exposed to it. The real prejudice that has at all times been done to the interest of religion by an improper application of this dangerous talent, is perhaps much greater than at first view we may conceive. We laugh at the solitary speculator, whose intellectual web, like that of the spider, who occupies his mansion, is of too flimsy a texture to be translated from the place of its construction without being injured. We smile in the same manner at the gloomy religionist, who sequesters himself from society, and who brands, by the designation of a conduct offensive to the Deity, the innocent gratification that constitutes felicity. But we perceive not that the shaft of ridicule upon this occasion is tainted with poison. Anger  
and



and hatred are implanted in the heart while a smile is impressed upon the countenance. And at the time when one character is depressed and defaced in the estimation of a young person; its opposite placed in the most favourable point of view, becomes an object of approbation to which he is ambitious of being conformed.

An application of those general remarks to the present subject will serve at the same time to illustrate their propriety, and to show in what manner ridicule on the clerical profession co-operates with other circumstances, as a cause of the infidelity of the times. Some part of the seducing arts, by means of which the young and the inconsiderate acquire notions unfavourable to revealed, and friendly in the same degree to natural religion, we have endeavoured, by an examination of the writings of modern deists, to detect, and to exemplify. These gentlemen are however sufficiently aware, that while the professed and natural advocates of our religion stand high in the public estimation, the arguments employed by them must have a weight in some measure proportioned to their strength.

and propriety. We shall see therefore that they attempt to destroy the effect of those by an unfair method, although a very effectual one, that of attacking the sincerity of their opponents, and the motives by which they are actuated. You will be ready to say as the consequence of what hath been advanced on this subject, that he who descends to this personal abuse betrays his consciousness of the weakness of a cause which he cannot support by more honourable means. It is true that he lies evidently open to this imputation. But we must acknowledge at the same time, that this disadvantage is compensated in the present instance by certain favourable accidents which render his impeachment apparently just and reasonable.

We have explained the disadvantages arising to the mere scholar, from the supposed nature of his occupations, and from the circumscribed sphere of his experience. One plea however of importance may still be urged in behalf of a society supposed to be formed for the most part of such members. It may be said, seemingly at least with reason, that the professions of men who defend a religion  
to

to the principles of which their general practice is considered as corresponding, are indications of their real sentiments, and are therefore sincere. To take off the force of this prepossession, is to do an essential injury both to the cause of Christianity, and to its advocates. Yet this point is gained with many persons, when much weight is laid upon the fact of being *paid* for taking a certain side of the question; a circumstance that, when enlarged upon, as being a temptation to insincerity, gives strength to the pleas of another kind when this accusation is enforced. On the contrary, our opinion of their adversaries is proportionally raised, when we view them as volunteers in the cause, uninfluenced by any motive but the love of truth, and as receiving no other reward than the noble one that accompanies the recollection of a good action.

The reader has anticipated in a great measure the application of these remarks to the clergy, or to those men, in the language of a noble author, whom “the state has appointed the guardians of holy writ\*.” Let

\* *Character. vol. 3. p. 71.*

us just run over the principal points of coincidence. These men are educated most commonly in retirement, and are conversant, from the nature of their profession, in studies of no pleasing and attractive quality. If we will take their character from the representation of a celebrated writer, "they must not, like the rest of the world, give scope to their natural movements and sentiments, but must set a guard over their looks and words and actions\*." This picture, which bears a general resemblance of its original, is far from being inviting or acceptable to the major part of mankind. It must farther be acknowledged, that although the clergy ought, from the peculiar turn of their studies, to be looked upon as better qualified than others to explain and to defend their religious principles; yet the fact, that they subsist by this profession, admits of being constructed to their prejudice. Hence it is that one of their worst enemies represents them under the despicable form of "being *hired* to defend the Christian system†."

\* *Hume's Ess. Mor. and Polit. Ess.* 24.

† *Bolingb. vol. 3. p. 290.*

Of those facts, and of every other exceptionable circumstance in the profession, manners, and occupation of a clergyman, the enemies of his religion take advantage, in order to accomplish ends that are prejudicial to both. They seem to apply to Christianity, and to its ministers, the ancient fable of Prometheus and Pandora. At the same time that they represent the *keepers of the celestial fire* as persons who cannot boast of having a *divine commission*, they consider *the chest deposited in their hands* as being pregnant with all the evils wherewith mankind have been afflicted. But our subject now calls upon us to attend to the benefit which modern freethinkers derive from the points above mentioned, and to the use that is made of them.

It will appear from examination, that these gentlemen employ every art by which religion may be wounded through the shields of its defenders, from the way of wit and ridicule to that of gross and scurrilous abuse. It is principally with those who use the first kind of arms that we have to do at present. “ Their concealed method of raillery (I adopt  
 “ the language of an elegant writer) steals in-  
 “ sensibly

“ sensibly upon the reader ; fills him with  
 “ endless prejudice and suspicion ; and, with-  
 “ out passing through the judgment, fixeth  
 “ such impressions on the imagination, as rea-  
 “ son, with all its effects, will hardly be able  
 “ afterwards to efface \*.”

Perhaps there is not in any language a work wherein more striking examples to the present purpose are to be met with, than in the well-known performance of the late Lord Shaftesbury †. I have indeed been inclined to think, that, if his Lordship loses sight upon any occasion of the Graces, who accompany him in every other walk, it is when he speaks of the clergy, against whom he seems to be actuated by peculiar animosity. Yet it must be acknowledged, that his ridicule, whether pointed at the livings, at the preaching, at the office of clergymen, or at the great Author of their religion, has actually produced the worst effect upon the minds of persons in early life. For upon them a stroke of delicate raillery will ever make a deeper and a more permanent impression, than arguments of any kind,

\* *Brown's Essays on the character*. p. 243.

† *Characteristicks*.

however justly selected, or particularly enforced.

In the following passage, in which his Lordship speaks of the clergy as of an incorporated society, paid for their labours by the state, he contrives with much address to make his account of them directly subservient to his purpose of undermining their religion, by making a general observation in which both are included. “ If (he says with some apparent modesty) the collateral testimony of some ancient records was destroyed, there would be less argument or plea remaining against that *natural* suspicion of those who are called sceptical, that the holy records themselves were no other than the pure invention and artificial complement of an interested party, in behalf of the *richest corporation and most profitable monopoly* in the world \*.” We have selected this remark, as it is a specimen of that concealed satire by which the noble author accomplisheth a detrimental end, with the purpose of putting our young readers on their guard against the effect of this satire in similar instances. The

\* *Miscel.* 1. ch. 3.

author's address, in the whole passage, lies in his artful manner of placing together the Christian religion as being a compilement, its ministers as the compilers, and their temporal emoluments, as the motive of suspicion, not in a direct assertion, but in a distant and envenomed insinuation.

But we should depreciate the talents of this spirited writer in his most distinguished sphere of excellence, were we to produce no other specimen of his *way of raillery* with such objects in view than those of the kind above mentioned. This section would swell to a volume, were we to follow our noble sportsman through all the mazes of the chase, in his favourite exercise of *parson-hunting*, accompanied, not like the redoubtable squire of *currish memory*, by his *pack* of four and two-legged brethren, fawning, grinning, and barking in concert\*, but associated with the laughter-loving Momus, and directed by the flambeau of Ridicule. Thus prepared and accoutered, woe to the sons of Night and Erebus, to the mysterious race of *black impostors*, who, roused from their lurking-holes

\* *Field. works*, vol. 6. p. 228. &c.



by the shouts of this joyous company, are *baited* without mercy for their entertainment.

Were we disposed, upon the present occasion, to attempt an imitation of the great original which his Lordship hath here set before us, we should entertain our readers, by carrying on our allusion to the scene above referred to, in the inimitable Joseph Andrews of Fielding. For it is certain, that, in this high-wrought exhibition, honest PARSON ADAMS, starting from his sleep when the *pack* above mentioned assaulted his *outworks*; scratching his bald pate, ill defended from so many ravenous enemies by his ragged and fluttering handkerchief; eying the remnant of his torn cassock; and staring with unutterable astonishment as he heard “*the wind whistling through his grey Wig\**,” now become the property of Jowler; is not more calculated to excite risibility, and far less to stir up any *more dangerous* passion, than the various transfor-

\* The wind whistling through his grey locks, his hair floating on the wind, &c. are expressions often picturesque and beautiful, in the songs of Ossian, of which the ludicrous application in the text is by no means used as implying censure.

mations that are here presented to us \*. At one time the victims of our noble author's vengeance

\* In justice to one of the best men, as well as best writers of his age and country, it is proper to observe, that the ADAMS of Fielding, endowed with a large proportion of his author's benevolence, is invariably an object both of esteem and of attachment. Neither of these passions is abated in the least degree by the *oddities* of his character; because the author does not lose sight in any instance of the qualities that render it respectable. His learning, although accompanied with perfect ignorance of mankind, produceth this effect, as being sullied by no blemishes by which disgust or aversion are excited. And the philanthropy apparent in his whole conduct renders him peculiarly the object of our affection. His ignorance of modern manners, and characters therefore considered as a single defect amidst so many valuable and excellent qualities, excites laughter unmixed with any bad passion; because nothing is left to the reader's imagination. This truly original character the author hath delineated in another work. See *Philos. and Critic. Obs. on Composition*, vol. 1. p. 342. &c. But far different from the picture exhibited by our excellent author, is the representation of the clerical order offered to us by Lord S—— and his disciples. The circumstances of which the former avails himself to instruct his readers, by showing the importance and necessity of obtaining a competent knowledge of mankind, in order to render the best character completely respectable; the latter employs to excite a ridicule against the whole society, that is productive of contempt and of hatred. Of the first passion *pedantry* is the object;

vengeance are “ flaming champions engaged  
 “ in combat \*.” At another period, they be-  
 come “ black inchanters infnaring the fair  
 “ sex †.” In an instant the scene is shifted,  
 and they re-appear in the form of “ glaziers  
 “ breaking casements, chasseys, lanterns, and  
 “ filling the whole neighbourhood with the  
 “ noise of blows and outcries, as they kick  
 “ about the bloated battering foot-ball ‡.”  
 Such, reader, are the transformations of the  
 flambeau of ridicule !

*O ! sacred weapon, left for truth’s defence !*

and for *truth’s discovery* too, our author adds.  
 Such are the forms under which the goddess  
 of Ridicule, exalted by his Lordship to the  
 high office of fixing the standard of Truth,  
 as an expression of gratitude for so great an  
 obligation, chose to discover to him the ce-  
 lestial being of whom he was in search § !

object ; as self-sufficiency, pride, and intolerant princi-  
 ples are of the last. Examples of this kind will be produ-  
 ced in the subsequent part of the section.

\* *Miscel.* 1. *ch.* 2.

† *Solil.* p. 2. *sect.* 3.

‡ *Miscel.* 1. *ch.* 2.

§ *Ess.* on Ridicule, *pass.*

But let us quit this dirty island for a moment, and converse a little with our witty foreign author upon this interesting subject. This gentleman makes short work with clergy of all denominations. A French prelate, he will tell you, is an unprincipled debauchee, originally called an *Abbe*, who is raised to that high station by female intrigue. An English Lord Spiritual he describes as an avaritious old pedant, bred in the gloom of a college. And the clergy of England in general he paints as a race who know little of the world, have much pious ambition, are scrupulously exact with their tithes, and get drunk with mighty little noise \*.

But the highest strokes of our author's *vis comica* are reserved for his *Presbyterian parson*, to whom he tells you that the gravest English clergyman is a *very Femmy* in comparison. The characteristics of this singular ani-

\* La mauvaise grace contractée dans l'université et le peu de commerce qu'on a ici avec les femmes, font que d'ordinaire un Eveque est forcé de se contenter de la sienne. Les Prêtres vont quelquefois au cabaret, parce que l'usage le leur permet ; et s'ils s'enyverent, c'est sérieusement et sans scandale. *Oeuvres de Volt. tom. 6. p. 115.*

mal are, he says, a broad brimmed hat, a long cloak covering a short coat, a solemn gait, and a morose aspect. When he attempts to speak, he is known by snuffling through the nose, and by averring that all clergymen who possess five or six thousand a year maintain scandalous correspondence with the WHORE of BABYLON \*.

Of the clerical order in these kingdoms, which our author characteriseth with so bold a hand, we need only to observe, that his representation of his own countrymen, although just in some particulars, is most probably exaggerated. The English clergy, on the contrary, form a body too respectable to be injured by general criticism so loose and unappropriated. But it may be proper to examine our author's account of the last society somewhat more particularly. We

\* Le dernier, (un presbyterien d'Ecosse) affecte une démarche grave, un air fâché, un vaste chapeau, un long manteau par dessus un habit court, préche du nez, et donne le nom de Prostituée de Babylone à toutes les eglises, où quelques Ecclésiastiques sont assez heureux pour avoir cinquantes mille livres de rent, et où le peuple est assez bon pour le souffrir, &c. *Oeuvres de Volt.* vol. 6 .p. 117.

would observe therefore concerning the European *Ouran Outang*, whom Mr de Voltaire describes as being a native of Scotland, that this animal has disappeared of late years in that country. It is indeed the opinion of some persons who wish to be thought sagacious, that he never had existence, nor could have had it any where, unless *in the brain of a Frenchman*. This however to be sure is a wicked slander.

Certain very inquisitive philosophers, having determined to ascertain the existence of this extraordinary phenomenon, after a laborious and fruitless search of it in the country assigned by our author, pretend to have discovered that this same wonderful being has migrated of late from its native region. And they conclude from certain striking marks of resemblance, that it still exists in the *lively French Abbe*, or motley animal, whom our author describes as an overgrown baboon, known to be of the monkey kind, although he has learned to speak by some accident, by his grimace and grinning. These same philosophers affirm, with much seriousness, that the above-mentioned Ouran Outang

tang may have exchanged, in the exhilarating climate of France, and among its lively inhabitants, his *solemn gait* for the *quick dancing step*, his *broad brimmed hat* for the *etiquette of the fashion*, his *morose aspect* for the *grin peculiar to his species*, and his *snuffling through the nose* for their propensity to *chattering*. The said animal's *talk* of incontinence in one country, may they remark, is now converted into *the practice* of it in another. And, according to their theory, it is a matter of little consequence whether the lady upon this occasion should be the WHORE of BABYLON, or any other female of similar reputation. In this manner do these philosophers attempt to ascertain the existence of this strange race of beings. But

—*Non nostrum est tantas componere lites.*

It is our purpose only to relate their conjectures, and we leave the reader to judge for himself.

Our observations have thus far respected the power and the effect of ridicule applied to depreciate the clerical character, and the causes that contribute most effectually to render it successful. We have exemplified

our remarks on this subject, that our young readers may be acquainted at one view with various modes of its application, and may be guarded against direct or insinuated accusation, of which the consequence is ultimately detrimental to religion.

But ridicule, whatever Lord S—— may say in behalf of it, cannot be monopolised by any party; and, when it is unsupported by serious representation, must fail of effectuating any purpose of importance. For even granting that, by means of this dangerous talent, an adversary should be rendered an object of hatred, as well as of laughter, on account of his profession, his readers, altho' prejudiced against his arguments, will not be rendered altogether unsusceptible of impression from them. In order to obtain this purpose effectually, it must be made apparently evident, by a charge laid down, and enforced by an enumeration of circumstances, that the members of a certain community are impelled by the nature of their office to deceive and to impose upon mankind. With this end, it is not only necessary that the conduct of those men should be arraigned,

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ed, as having been culpable at all times, but that an unfavourable estimate should be presented of the character that is formed by their occupations, of which the influence must be determined.

Among the various orders of men, it will be acknowledged that those will be most universally the objects of approbation or of censure, who are placed in the most conspicuous stations, and who are concerned in transactions the most interesting and important. We must likewise be convinced, that, in such situations, no conduct can be so unexceptionable or uniformly upright, as not to merit just reprehension ; far less can it be guarded against a scrutiny carried on with jealous attention, and directed wholly to the discovery of what is either defective or faulty. We may remark further, that with respect to the conduct of communities, a few facts placed in the worst light, and aggravated by invidious comments, will justify general censure and strong affirmation in the opinion of men who have been taught to think of this community with a violent and unfavourable prepossession. The weak, who are deceived

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with facility, and the unintelligent, who must decide from partial representation, become easily susceptible of this prepossession. And errors of which the history of every society is pregnant with examples, and which are amply compensated by opposite virtues, in some instances are made to form a general impeachment against a particular order, instead of being considered in their proper light, as originating ultimately in the imperfection of the human mind. Of this truth we shall produce an example before we conclude the present section.

Of all the establishments that have been formed among mankind for purposes of public utility, that of ecclesiastics has always been accounted one of the most considerable at least, if not the most conspicuous and important. For, to the members of this body men have at all times intrusted charges of the utmost consequence, placing confidence by this conduct in their sincerity, as well as in their superior ability, intelligence, and discernment. Nor can it be said, upon an impartial examination, that this confidence has been in general misapplied. It is a  
known

known fact, that the monuments of classical ingenuity, which have been the admiration of all ages, were preserved by this order of men from perishing at the time when the Northern Barbarians overspread the Roman empire \*. To them likewise, by universal acknowledgment, men of almost every nation, and at every period, have looked up for instruction in the various departments of religion and of philosophy. In these comprehensive spheres of investigation their counsels have at the same time directed the researches of men, and have influenced their opinions and their practice.

From this representation, the reader will remark, that it must have been impossible for men, however upright and capable, to avoid reproach in the exercise of so many, various, and complicated employments. And it is not denied, that, in the discharge of these, unjustifiable arts have been used by various classes of this great society, with the purpose of heightening the belief of their sanctity, of improving the opinion of their

\* See above, p. 34.

knowledge, and of rendering the confidence placed in their candour, capacity, and communications, unconditional and implicit. Nor is there a community upon earth intrusted with extensive privileges, and possessed of the means of imposition, against whom the charge of having abused those privileges in some cases, and of having employed these means to promote selfish and detrimental ends, may not be brought with propriety and with truth.

It is in consequence of so great a trust, and of such diversified occupations, that impeachments of various kinds are laid against the clerical order, whose public conduct having been exposed in this manner to general observation, has been the subject of so much unmerited censure and obloquy. The charge of having uttered falsehoods, we shall find to originate in their supposed mismanagement of records and of traditions. The imputation of duplicity we may trace to their conduct respecting sects and parties, whether political or religious. The accusation of pride ariseth from a deportment corresponding to the dignity of their office, and often prescribed

prescribed by the demeanour of their adversaries. Finally, the impeachment of hypocrisy is urged in consequence of an imagined disparity deemed to take place betwixt their public professions and their practice.

The tendency of animadversion thus unfavourable to the ministerial character, when enforced by specious arguments, to promote the cause of infidelity, is too obvious to require enlargement. It is however proper for the satisfaction of our young readers in particular, that we should exemplify our observations on this subject, by giving the accusation its full force in the words of the adversaries of Christianity, and by endeavouring at the same time to evince its futility.

Among those who arraign the public conduct of priests in all ages, with an avowed purpose of depreciating the character, the late Lord Bolingbroke is at the same time one of the most severe and most conspicuous accusers. As our noble author useth so much freedom with this order of men, whom he treats, as we shall see immediately, with peculiar virulence and animosity, his admirers

rers cannot take offence that we prepare our readers for hearing his charge, by characterising the works wherein it is so strongly enforced. Of his Lordship's writings then we will venture to affirm, that they are in general distinguished by two marks or signatures, of which each becomes predominant as occasion requires. One is, foul language and gross abuse of the greatest names ancient and modern, who have the misfortune to incur his displeasure. The other characteristic mark, is that of bold assertion, of loose sentiments, and of long declamatory discourses, which are often substituted in place of sound argument and of rational investigation \*. Should we be charged by any friend of Lord B—— with the fault of adopting the very practice that we condemn in the present instance, by asserting boldly, with-

\* We do not say that this is always the case of Lord Bolingbroke. When he is not misled by his passions, his composition, which is in general nervous and animated, is dignified by a corresponding energy, and even propriety of sentiment. But in the two great fields of religion and of politics, he is seldom so cool as to write with impartiality ; and his passions, when he talks of *ministers* in either department, lead him to assert without proof or proper examination.

out producing evidence, the reply is at hand. We accuse that man of using *foul* language in the proper sense of the term, who applies promiscuously the epithets of madman, blasphemer, audacious and vain sophist, whining philosopher, patient not yet restored to his senses, &c. &c. &c. to Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, among the ancients; to Dacier, Cudworth, Clark, Locke, Woolaston, among modern writers; and to the clergy in all ages, these and so many other reproachful epithets, as it would answer no good purpose to transcribe \*. Again, the charge of using declamation, unsupported by solid argument, may be urged with propriety against him, whose accusations either of individuals or of societies, far from being confirmed by reason, are maintained by strong and by accumulated affirmations. This observation we leave philosophers and politicians to establish in their examination of his other theories; and we proceed to exemplify it in his treatment of divines, as he calls them.

\* *Bolingbroke's works*, vol. 3. p. 113. 129. 392. vol. 5. p. 464. vol. 3. p. 441. 353. 393. 484. 485. &c.

One of the most striking evidences of our noble author's antipathy at *church-men* is his representation of them as having been the *fathers of lies* in all ages. This characteristic of Satan, his Lordship has discovered to be that of the priesthood. Let us see in what manner he makes out the accusation.

“ I agree, says he, that history has been  
 “ purposely and systematically falsified in all  
 “ ages. Let me say without offence, since I  
 “ can say it with truth and *am able to prove it*,  
 “ that ecclesiastical authority has led the way  
 “ to this corruption in all ages and all reli-  
 “ gions. How monstrous were the absurdi-  
 “ ties that the priesthood imposed on the ig-  
 “ norance and superstition of mankind in the  
 “ Pagan world concerning the originals of  
 “ religion and governments, their institutions  
 “ and rites, their laws and customs ! What  
 “ opportunities had they for such imposi-  
 “ tions, while the keeping the records, and  
 “ collecting the traditions, was in so many  
 “ nations the peculiar office of this body of  
 “ men ? A custom liable to the grossest  
 “ frauds, and even a temptation to them.  
 “ What numberless fables have been invent-  
 “ ed,



“ ed to raise, to embellish, and to support the  
 “ structures of Judaism and Christianity, ac-  
 “ cording to the interest and taste of the ar-  
 “ chitects ! Among the fathers of the Chri-  
 “ stian church, deliberate systematical lying  
 “ has been practised and encouraged from  
 “ age to age. \*”

Such is his Lordship's charge against  
 “ priests of all religions, and in all ages :”  
 A charge calculated to produce the worst  
 effect upon young readers, who sit down  
 to peruse his writings with a strong prepos-  
 session in his favour as a man of genius ; and  
 who being disqualified by indolence, by inca-  
 pacity, and in some degree by this very pre-  
 possession, to enter into the subject with im-  
 partiality, conceive a general prejudice against  
 men who are the objects of so universal a  
 censure. It is therefore necessary in the pre-  
 sent instance, to consider what our author  
 hath said to support it. To the accusation  
 as it hath been stated, and to Lord B——s  
 attack on the Christian priesthood, the fol-  
 lowing reply may not perhaps be impro-  
 per.

\* *Letter 4th on history.*

“ You say, my Lord, that the Pagan priest-  
 “ hood imposed monstrous absurdities on  
 “ the ignorance and superstition of mankind  
 “ concerning the originals of religions, &c.  
 “ You assign, as the cause of this imposition,  
 “ the confidence that was placed in this or-  
 “ der of men, who were entrusted with the  
 “ records and traditions of so many nations.  
 “ But by what argument have you proved  
 “ the first of these assertions? By none of  
 “ any kind. In the place of evidence, you  
 “ have substituted a few general exclama-  
 “ tions, How monstrous, &c. Taking the  
 “ matter however as you have thought pro-  
 “ per to represent it, I am at a loss to under-  
 “ stand what your Lordship means by say-  
 “ ing, that monstrous fables with respect  
 “ to the originals of religions and of nations,  
 “ have been imposed upon mankind by the  
 “ ancient priesthood. Every man who has  
 “ the least acquaintance with ancient histo-  
 “ ry, knows, that whatever respects the ori-  
 “ gin of nations, and of the rites, &c. which  
 “ prevailed in early ages, is involved in un-  
 “ avoidable obscurity. But he knows like-  
 “ wise that this has happened, not because  
 “ the priesthood falsified records, but because  
 “ in

“ in those early ages, there were no records  
 “ subsisting to be falsified. The invention  
 “ of letters, by means of which records are  
 “ framed and conveyed, was necessarily po-  
 “ sterior to the formation of society ; in the  
 “ same manner as the institution of the priest-  
 “ hood was subsequent to the systematical  
 “ knowledge of religion \*. Even after socie-  
 “ ty was established in the most ancient of  
 “ civilized nations, Egypt, Diodorus Siculus,  
 “ and many other ancient authors must have  
 “ informed you, that hieroglyphical symbols,  
 “ in the explanation of which a large field  
 “ was opened to conjecture, preceded the in-  
 “ vention of letters, for the purpose of con-  
 “ veying ideas †. If therefore knowledge  
 “ was so imperfectly communicated among  
 “ a people celebrated for the most early pro-

\* By the term *systematical*, applied here to religion, I  
 understand principles digested and methodised into some  
 form. A knowledge of truths thus regulated must have  
 preceded the institution of the priesthood ; because with-  
 out such knowledge, it would have been impossible to  
 ascertain the nature of the sacerdotal office ; or to assign  
 to individuals the departments which each was qualified  
 to occupy.

† ΑΙΟΔΟΡ. ΣΙΚΕΛ. βιβ. η.

“ ficiency,

“ ficiency, we may judge concerning the re-  
 “ cords that must have obtained credit among  
 “ those whose civilization was of a much la-  
 “ ter date.

“ But you observe, my Lord, that the an-  
 “ cient priesthood were intrusted not only  
 “ with the records of nations, but with their  
 “ traditions. Of these we acknowledge,  
 “ that the latter might have been falsified  
 “ without much difficulty. But why, let  
 “ me ask, does your Lordship fall thus un-  
 “ mercifully upon the poor priests for ha-  
 “ ving wilfully imposed false notions con-  
 “ cerning religion and government upon  
 “ mankind; without having gained proper  
 “ information, or having brought adequate  
 “ evidence of their crimes. Now, my Lord,  
 “ I will undertake to prove from your own  
 “ account of this matter, not only that you  
 “ have not produced such evidence, but that  
 “ no such evidence can be produced accor-  
 “ ding to your principles, by any man what-  
 “ ever.

“ With this purpose, you will permit me  
 “ to remark, that as it was the peculiar office  
 “ of

“ of the priesthood to preserve the records,  
 “ and to collect the traditions of nations ;  
 “ your Lordship’s impeachment of them as  
 “ having falsified these, can be derived from  
 “ no other information than their own.  
 “ Now, granting that the traditions above  
 “ mentioned were purposely falsified ; it  
 “ would not I apprehend follow, that they  
 “ were the authors of this imposition, unless  
 “ recourse could be had to original records,  
 “ that we might judge from comparison.  
 “ But the authors of those fables have inter-  
 “ fered with, corrected, and even contradicted  
 “ each other in their narrations. This is  
 “ no doubt true. But surely no consequence  
 “ unfavourable to the sacerdotal order, can  
 “ be deduced from this fact, whether the  
 “ members of this society were or were not  
 “ the authors of those narrations. The first  
 “ case will scarcely be affirmed. For it is  
 “ well known, that all the writers from  
 “ whose works certain confused and contra-  
 “ dictory accounts are extracted concerning  
 “ the originals of religion and of govern-  
 “ ment, were not priests. But should we grant  
 “ the contrary, what is the consequence ? The  
 “ natural conclusion to be drawn from their  
 “ interfering

“ interfering narrations, surely is, that no  
 “ collusion took place betwixt persons who  
 “ differ in opinion so far from each other;  
 “ a circumstance that is incompatible with  
 “ the imputation of their imposing falsehoods  
 “ and absurdities by agreement. But if it  
 “ is true, on the other hand, that these au-  
 “ thors had in general no concern with the  
 “ priesthood; but that they have handed  
 “ down the traditions which were collected  
 “ by that body of men, respecting the origi-  
 “ nals of religion, &c. in this case, it may  
 “ surely be said with equal probability, that  
 “ the collectors of those traditions made the  
 “ best use of the materials put into their  
 “ hands, as that they applied them to any bad  
 “ purpose. And it is not possible to prove  
 “ the contrary, unless recourse could be had  
 “ to vouchers, which, according to your  
 “ Lordship’s account of the matter, were to be  
 “ found only in their possession.

“ With respect to the measures adopted by  
 “ this community in later ages, to promote  
 “ what they deemed to be the cause of religi-  
 “ on, I do not say that all these merit appro-  
 “ bation. But should we grant that some  
 “ few

“ few individuals employed unjustifiable  
 “ means with this purpose, must their holy  
 “ romances, as you term them, lay the foun-  
 “ dation of a charge of systematical lying,  
 “ deliberately practised and carried on by  
 “ churchmen from age to age? Indeed, my  
 “ Lord, this, to say the least of it, is dealing  
 “ out such measure to others, as your Lord-  
 “ ship would not wish to be meted out to  
 “ yourself. But I check myself, and, far  
 “ from returning railing for railing, willingly  
 “ quit a subject on which it is not my inten-  
 “ tion to be particular. It is however to the  
 “ present purpose to remark, that the practi-  
 “ ces which you censure by the above men-  
 “ tioned reproachful epithet, characterised  
 “ not the more enlightened times, but the  
 “ first ages of the Christian church. It was  
 “ with this period as with the times in which  
 “ the heathen priesthood are supposed to  
 “ have falsified records. The cultivation of  
 “ science was obstructed by causes which it  
 “ is certainly not necessary to enumerate,  
 “ when Northern Barbarians overspread the  
 “ provinces of the Roman empire. The ma-  
 “ terials, therefore, from which the history  
 “ of those ages is extracted, were not falsi-

“fied by churchmen. Like wax stamped  
 “by the seal, they are indelibly impressed  
 “with the *signature of the times*.

“You are driven, my Lord, to the last shift  
 “of casuistical research, when, in order to sup-  
 “port your general accusation of the priest-  
 “hood, you are obliged to insinuate, that its  
 “members have industriously destroyed the  
 “works of them who have written against  
 “the church ; whereas, whatever she advan-  
 “ced to justify herself, is preserved in her  
 “annals, and in the writings of her doc-  
 “tors. This is acting like the judge I have  
 “somewhere heard of, who condemned a  
 “poor fellow to be hanged, not upon the  
 “proof of actual guilt, but upon the bare  
 “evidence of its possibility. By whom, let  
 “me ask, were the works destroyed to which  
 “you refer ? Were not these published to the  
 “world as well as those of the champions of  
 “the church, as you call them ? Might not  
 “the abettors of the doctrines contained in  
 “these writings, have preserved and have  
 “transmitted some part of them to posterity,  
 “notwithstanding the opposition of church-  
 “men, in the same manner as the glorious  
 “monuments



“ monuments of ancient genius that will  
 “ ever be read with admiration, were saved  
 “ from the rage of the Vandals and of the  
 “ Khalif\*. It is therefore much more rea-  
 “ sonable to suppose, that the works above  
 “ mentioned, perished on account of their own  
 “ insignificance, than in consequence of the  
 “ persecution of churchmen. And at any  
 “ rate, you cannot support your charge of  
 “ the corruption, and of the falsification of  
 “ history from the evidence of writings,  
 “ with which you neither are, nor can be  
 “ acquainted.

“ I need not follow your Lordship in the

\* The story, referred to in the text, of the Khalif  
 Oman Ebn Al Khaltab is well known. When Alexan-  
 dria fell into the hands of this savage, who devoted that  
 inestimable treasure of ancient learning, its celebrated li-  
 brary, to destruction; this barbarous logician determi-  
 ned the fate of the labours of the wise, and of the vir-  
 tuous in all ages, by the following syllogism. “ Either,”  
 replied he to his general, “ those books of which you  
 “ speak, agree perfectly with the book of God, or they  
 “ contain something different from its tenets, and re-  
 “ pugnant to them. In the first case, they are useless;  
 “ because the book of God is perfect, and contains all  
 “ truth. In the last case they are pernicious, and  
 “ therefore ought to be destroyed.”

“ proof of your great charge into the present  
“ times, at any considerable length. Every  
“ reader must observe, that, in order to sup-  
“ port it, you are obliged to quit the ground  
“ from which you set out; and to retrench  
“ an accusation which had for its object the  
“ whole Christian priesthood, to some prac-  
“ tices of the church of Rome. Your proce-  
“ dure in the present case is like his, who ha-  
“ ving besieged a strong fortress, and having  
“ amused his employers with promises of  
“ success, should content himself at last with  
“ the honour of breaking the panes of a  
“ window. I am not much concerned in  
“ the defence of this church, whose errors  
“ and absurdities gave occasion to the de-  
“ fection of so many nations. Yet I must  
“ remark, that your Lordship will not easily  
“ make good your charge even against this  
“ body of men, obnoxious as they are. A  
“ few legendary tales, which, according to  
“ your own account, are far from being cre-  
“ dited in general, and a few saints, of whom  
“ some are *unniched*, and all perhaps are tot-  
“ tering on *their pedestals*, created in the ages  
“ of credulity, and standing neglected in  
“ their separate compartments as monuments  
“ of

“ of that credulity, will not enable you to  
 “ prove the heavy accusation of systematic  
 “ lying, established from age to age,  
 “ even in that church; and of a plan regularly  
 “ formed and carried on to falsify history.

“ Upon the whole, therefore, my Lord, the  
 “ proof of your impeachment of churchmen,  
 “ whether Pagan or Christian, is lame and  
 “ dissatisfactory. In what manner the PER-  
 “ SONAGE above mentioned \* may chuse  
 “ to express his acknowledgments to your  
 “ Lordship for having disencumbered his  
 “ head of the *cap of darkness*, or the *lying cap*,  
 “ which he hath carried about for so many  
 “ ages, we cannot say. But as it does not fit  
 “ the head upon which you have attempted  
 “ to place it, we give it back in all humility  
 “ to the owners, either to re-adorn the brows  
 “ of its *ancient proprietor*; or, inscribed with  
 “ the motto DETUR OPTIMO, to be con-  
 “ signed as occasion may offer, to some more  
 “ deserving society.”

Thus far we have placed before the reader,

\* SATAN.

and

and have endeavoured to refute the charge that respects the *public conduct* of the clerical order in all ages, as this accusation is laid down, and is enforced in the writings of one of their most conspicuous adversaries. We remarked, that it is not only the design of those adversaries to injure the defenders of Christianity, by exposing their conduct as a society, but that they attempt likewise to present an unfavourable estimate of the character formed by their immediate occupations, of which they endeavour to determine the influence. Of this kind is the attack upon the pastoral office, considered as influencing character, that is carried on by the celebrated author of *Essays Moral and Political*. This gentleman, without making use of the *shining arms* of the former antagonist, or of the *more ponderous weapons* of the latter, is yet a more dangerous enemy than either. For by entering philosophically into the subject, he endeavours to evince, by arguments *a priori*, that certain vices of the most pernicious consequence arise immediately from the nature and exercise of this employment. An undertaking of this kind, carried successfully into execution, would certainly be prejudicial  
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in a very high degree to the Christian religion, if not subversive of it altogether. For what ideas must we form concerning a religion, the ministers of which are employed to recommend the practice of virtues which they themselves are induced by the spirit and by the tendency of their office, upon all occasions to violate? May we not suppose of young persons particularly, that they will be ready to transfer the passions of contempt and of hatred from the clergy themselves to the institutions of Christianity; and to pronounce, that those cannot be of divine original, as the characters professedly framed by them, as the pattern, are so disagreeable and so faulty? In fact, this is a sword which the enemies of our faith brandish with much ostentation. And its edge is then only thoroughly blunted when we oppose to it a practice becoming the gospel.

The author above mentioned keeps two great objects in view in his Essay on the Pastoral Office, as influencing character, the assemblage of moral and of intellectual qualities which this office hath a tendency to form. The first mentioned he describes as consisting

ing of dissimulation, of ambition, in the worst sense of that term; of self-sufficiency, impatience of contradiction, pride, and a persecuting spirit. With respect to the last, he acknowledges, that “ in *religions* founded “ upon *speculative principles* (are not *all* religions thus founded?) and where public “ discourses make a part of religious service, “ it may be supposed, that the clergy will “ have a considerable share of the learning of “ the times.” But he adds to this concession, that it is *certain* their taste in eloquence will *always* be better than their skill in reasoning and philosophy. That he may render the character thus delineated perfectly hateful, he placeth in opposition to it certain qualities which belong to the soldier, and which it is supposed that the military profession calls out into exercise\*.

Upon the first of those imputations it is only necessary to remark at present, that should we grant his account of the pastoral office to be just in every circumstance, yet this concession ought not to injure the cause

\* *Ess. Mor. and Philos. Ess.* 24. *pass.*

of Christianity. For this writer does not pretend to insinuate, that his description corresponds either to the precepts of the Christian religion, or to the example of its author. It is, however, to those precepts enjoining, in opposition to Mr Hume's representation, meekness, sincerity, humility, patience of contradiction, gentleness, peace, and universal toleration, that the Christian is required to be conformed. And the example in which all these virtues are displayed conspicuously, is proposed to be the model of his imitation. Permit not, therefore, my young friends, your prejudice against the pastoral office, even granting that it is well founded, to carry you beyond the objects which it ought immediately to respect. Endeavour to distinguish upon all occasions betwixt the spirit of the sacerdotal function, where you may judge it to be faulty; and the pattern to which the minister of Jesus *ought* to be conformed, as you find it delineated in the New Testament. By keeping this just and obvious distinction constantly in view, you will be enabled to judge concerning this matter as you ought to judge. And whatever opinion you may

form of individuals, your notions will not be perverted into prejudice against their profession.

Our observations have thus far proceeded upon the supposition, that this author's account of the spirit of the pastoral office, and of its influence on moral character, is well founded. That this however is far from being the case, is a truth of which the proof may be gained without difficulty. In fact, upon the principles employed in this Essay to depreciate the clerical office, a man may place in an unfavourable, and even in an odious light, the tendency of any office or profession whatever. With this purpose, he who reflects, that every cause admits of being placed in an unfavourable, as well as in an attractive and agreeable point of view, may chuse betwixt two courses, either of which will be effectual. He may either contemplate the *extreme only* to which some individuals may carry the practice of virtues arising from the spirit of their employment, and may charge faults that originate in the dispositions of private members of a society upon the nature of a general establishment.

Or



Or he may depreciate the establishment itself directly, by comparing it to some office that is more eligible in the popular estimation. By either, or by both methods, he will render the obnoxious circumstance an object of aversion, or of contempt. The reader may judge for himself concerning the truth and the propriety of this observation, by applying it to the commercial, military, or political departments. An enlargement upon this subject is happily superseded in the present instance. For the Essay above mentioned is particularly examined, and its author's representation is proved to be unjust in every circumstance respecting moral character by Dr Gerrard, in his excellent sermon, entitled "The influence of the pastoral office on the character examined, with a view to Mr Hume's representation\*." To this discourse, as containing a judicious and satisfactory refutation of our author's charge, the reader who may wish to enter at length into this matter is referred.

\* Preached before the Synod of Aberdeen, and published in 1760.

But with the intellectual qualities to which the pastoral employment gives full scope, the case is very different. The judicious author above mentioned observes very justly upon this subject, “ that, if ministers are unacquainted with the rules of just reasoning, and are only qualified for popular declamation on subjects taken for granted without inquiry, their hearers might be inclined to listen to those who tell them that the doctrines which they teach are mere fables destitute of evidence, though they are not possessed of a degree of reason sufficient for detecting the fallacious arguments produced in support of them ; it might prepare them for *expecting wonderful discoveries in the writings of infidels*, and *prejudice them against our* (the clergy’s) *vindications of religion.*” Our readers will perceive, that an examination of the sentiments of our author on this subject falls naturally into the present inquiry. It is therefore necessary that we enter somewhat more particularly into the question before us.

In reply to this gentleman’s observation on the intellectual character that is formed in  
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the clerical department, we may remark, that the parts of his proposition do not coalesce with each other. For his acknowledgment that the clergy will possess a considerable share of the learning of the times, when that learning respects the principles of religion, does not appear to be very consistent with their alledged defect of philosophical skill. I shall be glad to know by what faculty of the mind an investigation into the principles of religion is conducted, and whether the powers of understanding are not as much exercised in such investigation as in any inquiry whatever? Is not close reasoning and the power of discerning, and of distinguishing intellectual objects from each other, requisite to ascertain the reality of these principles, to mark out their separate provinces with accuracy, to determine the degree of their efficacy, and to remove the objections by means of which it is attempted to subvert their influence? If those questions are answered in the affirmative, it will follow, that he who is employed in studies of this nature must possess considerable philosophical abilities, in order to acquire “the learning of the times;” and that

that those abilities will receive as much improvement in the course of this examination, as in any process of reasoning in which they can be exerted. Our author's dogmatical affirmation, therefore, that "the taste of clergy-men in eloquence will be *always* better than their skill in reasoning and philosophy," like that of his fellow champion in the same cause, stands unsupported in this formidable Essay by any other evidence than his *ipse dixit*.

But the last part of Mr H——'s assertion demands more particular animadversion. For he appears by it to establish a distinction between eloquence and philosophy, which is as incompatible as his notable separation of reason from faith. Had this author's *innate attachment* to novelty and paradox permitted him, upon the present occasion, to recollect what he must have read on the subject of eloquence in the writings of Quintilian and of Cicero, he would have reflected, that philosophical skill in the highest degree is indispensably necessary to the attainment of excellence in the department of the orator. He would have perceived, in this case, that  
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the reasoning in which, according to his theory, the spirit of the pastoral office renders a clergyman defective, forms, in the estimation of those writers, the first and principal part of that eloquence in which he acknowledgeth that this spirit will render him a proficient. By what means, therefore, taste can be formed in one province, when skill is comparatively and necessarily deficient in the other, certain metaphysical inquirers into the arcanæ of nature must be left to determine. By the term *taste*, I understand, when it is applied to eloquence, a power of discerning its genuine excellencies, so as to be suitably impressed by them. Now, if we are to consider clear and decisive evidence as a principal excellence, it will follow, that this perception or faculty must be adapted to comprehend it. He therefore whose reasoning powers are unequal to the pursuit of philosophical deduction, cannot be said to possess taste in an art to the knowledge of which a power of comprehending that deduction is so indispensably requisite.

We have now endeavoured to place before the reader whatever hath been urged against  
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the ministers of our religion by their adversaries, either in the way of raillery, or of direct and serious accusation. In our remarks on this subject, we have sedulously kept in view the *great end* which reflections of this nature are calculated to accomplish. Christianity hath been attacked on all sides by its enemies, and no method of prevailing against it hath been left untried by those who wished to subvert its influence. But among its many opponents, consisting of philosophers, historians, men of wit and humour, false friends, dissembling advocates, and avowed antagonists, perhaps those of the whole tribe are most to be dreaded, who carry on their attack by saps, and who endeavour to undermine the foundation of the citadel by having recourse to expedients of which the purpose is not immediately discerned. To this end no method can conduce more effectually, where religion is concerned, than that of calling in question the resolution and the sincerity of its defenders. If the ministers of Jesus, like mercenaries who fight only for pay, are engaged in the defence of their common faith, merely because it contributes to their private emolument; or if men can be

brought

brought to believe that this is the case, whether true or false in reality ; the stroke that is apparently aimed at the members of a society, overturns in its rebound the principles by which they profess to be regulated. And the greater number of men, who cannot perhaps enter into close reasoning on this subject, yet, while they are persuaded of the selfishness and insincerity of the former, will not be persuaded that the latter have their foundation in truth.

That you may render ineffectual this oblique but dangerous assault upon religion, you ought, my young reader, to be aware of the intention with which the sacerdotal character is misrepresented by those who desire to deface the pattern to which it is required to be conformed. A point of considerable consequence will be gained, if you keep *this*, as the principal end of such misrepresentation, constantly in sight. You will thus be enabled to distinguish betwixt just observation, as the mean of pointing out real errors, to the end that they may be rectified, and studied abuse, by whatever plausible colours it may be screened from vulgar cognisance.

You will remark, that the purpose which the authors of this abuse mean to accomplish, is, not to rectify errors, but to place them in the worst lights ; not to guard a society against faults supposed to arise from the spirit of their profession, but to subvert the institution itself, by rendering both this institution, and those who are interested to support it, alternately the objects of contempt and of ridicule.

Clergymen are by profession the natural defenders of religion. They ought likewise to be her ablest advocates, because it is their immediate business to obtain information concerning her laws and ordinances. In the duties of their employment every virtue may be called out successively into exercise. But to produce at all times a certain serious circumspection is its most obvious tendency. And a deviation from the established decorum of this virtue is more conspicuous, as its prevalence is required to be more powerful and universal. In them therefore the common and unavoidable failings of human nature are not overlooked, as these are in others. They are “ cities set on a hill,” and must be  
aware,



aware, that although all the good may not be their friends, yet all the bad will most certainly be their enemies. He therefore who remarks the corruptions that take place in this community, as in all others, and who points them out in the spirit of meekness, who lays open the causes of their degeneracy, and, when they have erred, who endeavours to bring them back to their original standard, is the friend of truth, whose admonitions ought to be received with thankfulness, and whose rebuke should be regarded with submission. But does this appellation pertain to that man who substitutes ridicule on the persons, character, and occupations of clergymen, in place of exhortation, admonition, and reproof? Is this noble designation characteristic of him who scans the actions of those men with a jealous and penetrating eye, who attempts to deduce them from the most unwarrantable motives, who studies to darken his picture with the deepest shade, and to present a lame and distorted caricature, in place of a just and striking resemblance of his original? Let the reader, who may pronounce upon the truth of these observations from the examples that have been

produced in this section, judge concerning this matter for himself.

With the adversaries of our religion a churchman must be in fault, merely because he is a churchman, let him speak, act, or think as he can. Does he make it his principal business to explain the nature and tendency of vice, in order to prevent its contagion from becoming universal? He is then a clown, unacquainted with the manners of a gentleman, who knows nothing of any faults, but of those which he calls sins \*. Is he polite, engaging, affable? He is then opposed to the fair and courteous knight as a black and mysterious enchanter †. Is he ambitious of eminence in his profession? His ambition will be gratified by promoting ignorance and superstition, implicit faith, and pious frauds ‡. Does he indulge an innocent cheerfulness and gaiety of heart? This indulgence is contrary to the spirit of his office, which will prompt him at

\* *Charact. Solil. p. 1. Sect. 1.*

† *Solil. p. 2. Sect. 3.*

‡ *Hume's Ess. Mor. and Polit. Ess. 24.*

all times to “repress the gaiety of pleasure\*.” Is he serious upon all occasions, without ever indulging this harmless propensity? Avoid then his company; for, under the mask of devotion, he will violate every sanction of morality †. Has he, in short, all the external marks of a good man, whose looks, words, and actions are inoffensive? You are not, however, to judge of him by any of those rules. He is a gross hypocrite, who, without real candour and sincerity, assumes the specious appearance of these virtues, that he may obtain the veneration of an ignorant vulgar.

Such is the picture of the ministers of religion, divested of a few artificial colours, which the authors above mentioned hold up to the contemplation of mankind. I do not think so badly of those men whose names on some accounts are justly respectable in the republic of letters, as to believe that they are the enemies of priests, in their character of public instructors appointed to explain and to enforce the principles of moral conduct. I am convinced that they are strangers to

\* *Hume's Ess. Mor. and Polit. Ess.* 24.      † *Ibid.*

that

that malignity wherein this hatred must originate. Their purpose is to overturn the religion of which these men are the avowed defenders; and so far as the adversaries of revelation proceed towards this end by weakening the effect of whatever the friends of Christianity advance in its defence, so far we must acknowledge that they adhere to their intention. Their conduct in this matter is prescribed by the great principle of which we have traced so many effects, the desire of imitation. This powerful cause of action they bring over to their own party, by placing their adversaries in a light that renders an approach to them seemingly both dangerous and disagreeable. For in the same proportion as this desire is repelled from one side, it is attracted to the other; the persons, characters, and tenets of those who succeed in depreciating their enemies, becoming its objects.

Consider, therefore, my young friends, every injurious attack on the office of a clergyman, by an open advocate of infidelity, as a call upon you for candour and impartiality. To this despicable method of promoting a  
bad

bad cause, a noble enemy will scarcely ever be prompted to descend by any motive. When, by taking this course, he depreciates the dignity of his character, you ought to view him in the light of a desperate opponent, driven to his last resource, and making use, in his extremity, of any expedient by means of which the fall of a tottering edifice may be suspended for a season.

## S E C T. IX.

### *Causes of Scepticism.*

WE have now examined some principal causes of the infidelity of the times. But does the term *infidel* characterise all those who, living in a Christian country, do not acknowledge the divine authority of this religion? It is well known, that, among modern theorists, scepticism is become the *fashionable* philosophy. At a time, therefore, when its prevalence is so universal, an inquiry into the causes in which it originates, and an attempt to guard our young readers against the indulgence of a disposition that is destructive of happiness,

happiness, cannot be unreasonable, and may be productive, if properly executed, of the happiest effects.

But is it of the present times only that scepticism is characteristical? Or is its influence confined within the circle prescribed by an investigation of the nature and principles of religion? We shall evince, in the course of this section, that a propensity to doubt hath characterised mankind in the most enlightened ages of antiquity, as well as in the present times, and that of this doubt the clearest and the most irrefragable truths have been rendered the objects.

From the contracted sphere within which the range of the human intellect is confined, and from that eager curiosity and desire of knowledge by which it is impelled to overleap the bounds assigned to its research, the tendency to doubt derives its origin that produceth so many detrimental consequences. To trace the errors, the absurdities, and the faults of mankind, up to qualities and to accomplishments which merit general approbation, and to consider them as originating in  
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the misapplication and abuse of excellence, is to engage in an inquiry at the same time curious and instructive. It is like following the wandering stream that stagnates on the field, and obstructs the progress of the traveller, up to the noble river from which it has glided imperceptibly; a process by which we are enabled to drain the stagnant water effectually, by embarring the source whence it originally flowed.

Let us then remark, that, in a certain degree, doubt and cautious suspense are justly considered as indications of wisdom, and stand in opposition to the temerity and precipitance of folly. He who hesitates, and who weighs a matter on all sides before he forms a resolution, and proceeds to act from it in his transactions with mankind, will most probably avoid the perplexities into which the unwary are ready to be betrayed. His caution likewise, or circumspection, as it is denominated, will be his surest guard amidst the various and complicated events of life. It is remarkable, that Homer, who was one of the wisest men, as well as the greatest poet of his age and country, makes this pro-

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pensity

penfity to doubt, and to fpeak with fufpicious warinefs upon all occafions, the charac-  
teriftical quality of his Ulyffes, and the vir-  
tue that recommended him moft particularly  
to the goddefs of *Wifdom*.

*How prone to doubt, how cautious are the wife*  
fays his divine patronefs. And again,

*This fhow's the friend by old experience taught,  
And learn'd in all the wiles of human thought.*

He who reflects upon the difficulty of  
guarding againft errors in his investigation  
of truth refpecting either religion or philofo-  
phy, will acknowledge, that the cautious pro-  
cedure fo beneficial in active employment  
will produce likewife the moft falutary ef-  
fects in the prefent. It is fit that a creature  
whom reflection muft render fenfible of his  
weaknefs upon every occafion, fhould be ti-  
mid and diffident, rather than forward and  
prefumptuous, when he at firft fets out in  
this refearch. And of him who receives te-  
nets with implicit fubmiffion, as being well  
founded, becaufe they are inculcated by fome  
eminent philofopher, or have been the creed  
of his own progenitors, it may be faid with  
truth,



truth, either that his understanding must be very deficient, or that it is employed to very little purpose.

The precepts of ancient philosophers, enjoining their disciples circumspection and modesty in their inquiries, and recommending diffidence and doubt, as being proper to accompany young persons in their examinations, were therefore thus far the best adapted to their circumstances and situations. Whence then arose that habit of calling in question all principles and all propositions, of whatever nature, which is so far from corresponding to the spirit of these precepts? From their abuse, I reply, and from a desire to avoid the charge of credulity, as being a vulgar imputation, by flying to an extreme wherein folly and ignorance discover singular characters of wisdom and of sagacity. To doubt concerning the truth of every proposition, of which the proof is not fully laid before the mind, is the part of a wise man in the true sense of that term. But is the nature and tendency of this wisdom to render its possessor gloomy, disconsolate, suspicious? This surely will not be affirmed. We shall see afterwards, that

internal inquietude is the effect of excess in the indulgence of a rational propension; and that the inquietude must increase proportionally, as the subjects in which the transgression of just limits is conspicuous, are more interesting and important.

It is justly observed by a modern writer of eminence, that religion is the only subject in which scepticism is dangerous; because it ought to be grounded upon *certainly*, and its aim, nature, tendency, and objects, fall to the ground as soon as the mind ceaseth to be persuaded of its reality \*. When indeed we consider the great doctrines which religion offers to the view of mankind, and their relation to happiness, the state of that man who lives in perpetual suspense concerning their truth must be the most gloomy and forlorn imaginable. He who either frames certain principles of action, however irrational, to himself, or who openly avows his disbelief of commands that would contract his sphere of enjoyments, will pass away life in greater tranquillity than he who fluctuates in his persuasion of their propriety or existence.

\* Bayle Art. Pyrrho.

For the dream of sensuality, which in the latter case is broken by many traces of unpleasant reflection, without being brought to a period, glides on in the former instance, without shade or interruption, to the end.

The sceptical philosopher, rendered thus unhappy during the greater part of his life by the solicitude of suspense, must feel this solicitude more strongly as he draws near to the end of it. At this important season, to be in doubt with respect to the future existence of the mind, when nothing has been done during life to provide for its felicity in the *possible* event of existing, is to feel misery from which they who imagine themselves to have obtained certainty on either side of the question are necessarily exempted. In this case, the question of the dying Roman to his soul,

*Quæ nunc abibis in loca  
Pallidula ?*

becomes *indeed* a serious one. And the remark of an illustrious ancient philosopher, that men ought to distrust their own judgment, rather than to doubt concerning principles that cannot be overthrown without  
injuring

injuring truths of the most essential importance, by whatever specious disputant they may be impugned \*, cannot be too strongly inculcated and enforced.

That a habit of thinking, of which so many evils are the consequences, should be industriously propagated by the professed instructors of mankind in any age, is a truth not to be believed by a stranger to the opinions and to the practices of men, without irrefragable evidence. Yet we need not observe to any reader, that at no time whatever are principles arising from intellectual debility, and expressive of it, more universally disseminated, than at the present enlightened æra. Nor can the history of former ages produce greater or more numerous examples of philosophers with all the powers of understanding, and all the light of science, who have laboured more assiduously to establish the doctrine of universal suspense.

\* Πρωτον μὲν τοινοῦν ἐφη εὐλαβηθῶμεν καὶ μὴ παρωμεν εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν, ὡς τῶν λόγων κινδυνεύει, ὅθεν υγιὲς εἶναι. Ἀλλὰ ποδὺ μᾶλλον ὅτι ἡμεῖς ὕψω υγιῶς ἐχομεν, ἀλλ' ἀδριστεον καὶ πρὸς μνηστειον υγιῶς εἶναι, &c. ΠΛΑΤΩΝ. ΦΑΙΔ. κεφ. μ.

But fair and softly, my good reader. You must not imagine that those knights of the woful countenance, those champions of the venerable anarch Chaos, who profess to restore her ancient empire, are always so much her advocates in reality as they are in appearance. At the time when they would professedly introduce scepticism into all subjects, a discerning reader will remark, that their declarations upon certain points are sufficiently explicit, and exhibit no marks of diffidence, or of hesitation. Their sceptical countenance is often assumed, as being most effectually subservient to a particular purpose. And when they speak concerning the evidence of certain tenets as being unphilosophical, or of the tenets themselves as being mysterious, the veil is too flimsy to conceal their affirmation, that the first is utterly inadequate, and that the last are incomprehensible and absurd\*. Of this circumstance we take notice  
at

\* Let the reader who would be satisfied with respect to this matter, compare those essays of Mr Hume in which he is professedly sceptical, with his essay on miracles, his natural history of religion, and with his attempt to exterminate the religious principle altogether in his posthumous work above quoted. From this comparison

at present, only as being an instance of inconsistent representation. For their purpose of introducing universal scepticism is too apparent upon other occasions, to be passed over by any reader without observation. The effect of their attempt is likewise obvious in the prevalence of their opinions among men who have not absolutely rejected Christianity as a scheme unworthy of the Deity.

To what causes, it is asked, ought this sceptical fluctuation, so subversive of all confidence, and so inimical to happiness, be ascribed? In reply to this question, let us observe, that there are two classes of men to whom the term *sceptical* may be applied with

rison he will perceive, that this patron of sceptical opinions can *assert* with as much boldness and confidence, when the mode of affirmation is subservient to his purpose, as at other times he can expatiate upon the propriety of carrying universal diffidence and suspense into all subjects without exception. The works of Bayle, of Voltaire, and even of Rousseau, who is perhaps the least chargeable with this inconsistency, exhibit evidences of it which it would be improper, and indeed superfluous to enumerate at present. The reader who is acquainted with their writings will easily select illustrations for himself.

propriety,

propriety, and whom, in an attempt to investigate the causes of scepticism, it is necessary to distinguish from each other. These are, the original authors of these principles, by whom they are embraced and propagated; and the persons who, by their writings and conversation, have been proselyted to their opinions. Among both, the four following causes may be assigned as being adequate to this effect. The first is an attempt to investigate propositions, and to account for phenomena, to the comprehension of which the human intellect is unequal. The second will be found in a certain preposterous desire to display *acumen* and powers of ratiocination, by rendering all points indiscriminately the subjects of controversy and of disputation. The third is constituted by bad example co-operating with the love of pleasure to seduce a mind tinctured originally with good principles, but led into error by the impetuosity of passion. The last and perhaps the most powerful cause of modern scepticism, is the rejection of what is usually denominated revealed religion. Upon those causes, operating to a purpose so prejudicial to mankind, it may here be proper to make some observations.

Within the first class, all those theorists or sophists are comprehended, who, attempting “to be wise above what is written,” and to carry their researches farther into the nature of things and their final causes, than their predecessors, conceive inexplicable hypotheses, of which they cannot dispose the parts into any consistent and proportioned form. Of this unhappy choice of subjects the consequence is, that they who make it, being unable to determine questions with certainty that are above the human understanding, ascribe that equivocal nature to all objects which they have found to be characteristic of a few. With the limited faculties of which man is possessed, it is obvious that he must often be bewildered in the course of his researches, when carried beyond a certain boundary, as much when they respect common and intelligible subjects, as when employed to investigate those which are less easily understood. When we speak concerning propositions or phenomena that are beyond comprehension, we do not mean to include within our enumeration abstracted and theoretical points only, and doctrines upon which various hypotheses may be framed with probability.



bability. In fact, the plainest subject may be rendered thus inexplicable by men who, in the course of their reasoning from established principles, puzzle themselves and their readers by multiplied distinctions, and by subtleties of which it is not possible to pronounce with adequate precision and perspicuity. Of both kinds it may be proper to produce examples.

In the sphere of natural philosophy, those men appear to be engaged in an inquiry that cannot be brought to any satisfactory conclusion; who ascribe *thought* to an arrangement and combination of material particles; and who attempt to account for it by the known laws and principles of motion. In this case, the subject to be investigated is beyond comprehension; and no data or postulates are placed before the mind from which it can form any just and rational hypothesis.

Philosophers, on the other hand, whose inquiries respect the principles of morals, frame theories equally incomprehensible with those of the former, when their purpose is to subvert the opinions of mankind

on plain questions, with respect to which as rules of conduct they entertained not formerly the least scruple or suspicion \*.

I

\* The fundamental proposition of Mandeville's well-known work, that "private vices are public benefits" introduceth much sophistical reasoning of the present kind, calculated to perplex a plain subject, and to render an honest unsuspicious reader sceptical concerning every point on which his thoughts are employed. What this author meant by saying that "the moral virtues are the political offspring which flattery begot upon pride," he must have known best himself. When in short one author of distinguished eminence denies the existence of a moral sense conferred with the purpose of distinguishing good from evil; when another informs us that there is no moral turpitude in the practice of adultery; because fidelity to the marriage-bed would never have been thought of as a virtue, but that the long and helpless infancy of man requires the combination of parents for the subsistence of their young; when a third becomes the professed advocate of sensual gratification, which can't, he says, be criminal when it pleases the individual, and tends to propagate the species; and, to sum up all, when a fourth more daring than the others, affirms that nothing is in itself good or evil, but that every man's sense of propriety or fitness is his rule of action, of those assertions, and of the arguments brought to support them, what is the consequence? Not surely conviction that matters really are as they are here represented. Readers who cannot comprehend the reasonings of men

to

I do not here speak of these tenets as being prejudicial in the highest degree to society, by loosening all the bonds of confidence and of moral obligation. Their tendency to produce universal scepticism is the point to be considered at present. Men may be reasoned into the belief of any proposition respecting objects, of which they can conceive that it is possible to prove or to illustrate the truth. But there are certain axioms and positions of which the mind is in the highest degree tenacious as being well founded. And an attempt to disprove their reality, even granting it to be as successful as any attempt of this nature can be, must produce effects which no good member of society will ever wish to take place.

to whom they look up with admiration, and who at the same time are diffident of their own judgment, will charge themselves with weakness, rather than accuse the author, or even censure his choice of a subject. Being satisfied, therefore, after repeated trials, that the arguments employed against certain tenets, are ineffectual to the purpose of effacing their influence, they fall into a gloomy state of doubt, and of anxiety which comprehends at last all objects that come to be contemplated. *Vide Fab. of the Bees*, p. 37. *Bolingbroke's works*, vol. 5. p. 479. *Hume's Ess.* vol. 3. p. 70. *Hobbes de Cive*, cap. 6. sect. 18. &c. *Tind. Christ.* p. 335.

Among

Among facts or propositions which are thus established by general consent, we may reckon the belief of an essential distinction supposed to subsist betwixt the properties of matter and those of spirit; a belief established upon such grounds which no reasoning whatever can be powerful to eradicate. For he who contemplates unanimated matter in all its forms, can judge from feeling in some measure, that thought may be superadded to a certain conformation of parts; but cannot be ascertained that any combination of solid and of extended substances will *create* this faculty. You may perplex and darken, and confound his ideas by telling him that the parts of all material substances are in perpetual agitation; that from a certain exquisite organization and arrangement of parts thus agitated the faculty of thinking may be derived; and that we therefore “preserve this faculty of thinking while we are alive, in the same manner as we do of moving, and of other corporeal faculties \*.” You may inform him, with one ancient philosopher, that the soul is fea-

\* *Boling. works*, vol. 3. p. 516. &c.

ted in the blood \* ; with another, that it was generated from an infinite matter existing from eternity † ; with a third, that men, beasts, and trees sprung up at once from certain dews or drops that fell from heaven;

———— *alma liquentiis*

*Humorum guttas mater cum terra recepit*

*Fæta, parit nitidas fruges, arbutaque læta,*

*Et genus humanum ‡.*

Lastly, you may, with the philosophical poet above quoted, and with a celebrated modern philosopher, tell him, “ that the phenomena, from our birth to our death, “ seem repugnant to the immateriality and “ immortality of the soul,”

*Quique pariter cum corpore et una*

*Crescere sentimus, pariterq. senescere mentem §.*

But to all these hypotheses, such a man

\* Vid. ARISTOT. *περί Ψυχρ. βιβ. α.*

† Anaximander infinitatem natura dixit esse e qua omnia gignarentur. *Academ. Quest. Lib. 2.*

‡ *Lucret. de Rer. Natur.*

§ *Boling. ubi supra, p. 557.*

will oppose the first dictate of reason on this subject which points out to him the difference betwixt a substance that is agitated, and one that is intelligent. The sea, he will observe, and the air are perpetually in motion. But does the mind perceive the least connection between this motion and thought or intelligence, so as to say in what manner the former becomes a cause of which the latter is an effect? You engage, he will say, in a research to which the limited faculties of man are wholly unequal. Observe the parts of which the human frame is composed, and examine them with attention. Do you comprehend the manner in which the powers of reason, understanding, and memory are produced by the combination of those parts? Or is there any chemical process by means of which you can discover the *natural* relation of any material substance to the powers above mentioned, or even the slightest trace and shadow of resemblance? With respect to the phenomena he will remark, that they are not sufficiently steady and uniform to be the foundation of any rational theory upon this subject. He will deny that these take place in many instances; because the faculties

ties of the mind are often found to be unimpaired and even vigorous at the time when the parts of the body are tending towards dissolution. Besides, those phenomena establish no other than this simple truth at the utmost, that there is a close connection betwixt the soul of man and his body. To urge them, therefore, as proofs either that the spirit has no existence, or that it is dissolved with the corporeal frame, is to form a conclusion which the premisses do not justify.

While men, however, argue thus against the sophistical theories of false philosophers, on subjects surpassing the cognizance of human intellect, it is yet certain, that embarrassment and perplexity are excited by perusing them. This happens in consequence of our strong and natural attachment to the objects of sense, to which an appeal, however irrational, fails not to make a powerful and permanent impression. Hence, notwithstanding all that is urged in opposition to it, the argument against immortality, arising from the repugnant phenomena, derives its efficacy. Our first, and most immediate

sources of information are the senses, in the intelligence conveyed by which we are led by the constitution of our nature to place at all times an implicit confidence. He, therefore, who can render the phenomena presented by them apparently favourable to his view of a subject, will never fail, if not to gain the general suffrage in his own behalf, at least to raise suspicions in unenlightened minds concerning the reality of those objects to which the former are deemed to be opposite. In this case it ought to be remarked, that all men are judges of external appearances, while few can comprehend the arguments by which their fallacy is detected. And the doubt respecting the strength and propriety of these last is increased according to the abstracted nature of the subject, and to the difficulties arising from examination.

While scepticism originates upon one hand in this manner in the investigation of points that are above understanding, and in the specious application of known phenomena; it is occasioned as certainly in other cases, by an attempt to overturn principles of action in moral science, of which the belief  
and



and the impressi<sup>o</sup>n are universal. The existence of a faculty or sense by means of which we distinguish good from evil, our belief that the practice of virtue must ever be beneficial to the community, as much as vicious indulgence must be destructive of it; our sentiment of an obligation to practise temperance, justice, chastity (particularly in the married state), as being virtues which the Deity beholds with approbation, are likewise propositions to which the mind gives a full and immediate assent. But it is certain, that the facts above mentioned have been called in question by men who never attempted to disprove the truth of such an axiom as the following. I exist, or solidity and extension are essential properties of matter, and others of the same kind. Plausible evidence is collected, and is laid down in a clear and serious manner, tending to refute these maxims, and to destroy their effect. Distinction and metaphysical subtlety are employed to render even the plainest path perplexed and intricate, when recourse cannot be had to more appropriated and more justifiable expedients\*.

Of

\* You demand an example, reader. Take the following

Of these attempts to explode the received opinions of mankind in all ages and in every situation

following illustration of our remark as an instance of that taste for idle and frivolous observation by which the writings of modern sceptics are characterised: A taste, that, by being carried into all subjects, tends to puzzle and to mislead the reader, instead of conveying to him any solid or useful information. Love and esteem, says Mr Hume, are nearly the same passion, and arise from similar causes. The qualities which produce both are such as communicate pleasure. Again. Good sense and genius, he tells us, beget esteem. Wit and humour excite love and affection. *Hume's Ess. vol. 3 p. 114.* In the judgment of some readers these will be refined observations, and will be said to argue ingenuity. But we produce them as evidences of the extreme difficulty of rendering remarks of this kind that minister only to curiosity, philosophically just. Even when this is the case, likewise, the reader may put the question *cui bono?* with propriety. For the information conveyed to an intelligent reader will not compensate the trouble which it cost him to comprehend the author's meaning. And to those of an ordinary class, the subject by this subtlety of distinction will become unintelligible. In the present instance we will venture to affirm, that neither of our author's observations are well founded. Love and esteem are by no means nearly the same passion; nor do they arise from causes that have similarity. Every man must be sensible that they respect different objects in the intercourse of life, wherein we are compelled to esteem those men very highly whom we cannot love, and,

*vice*

situation upon points of which feeling and experience determine the reality, the success cannot be complete. For the reader will

*vice versa*, to love characters which we do not esteem. This effect must be traced to the *diffimilar* causes that give rise to these passions. Of esteem, intellectual qualities as Mr H—— observes, or great actions are the objects; whereas love is attracted to the moral virtues or to endowments which are denominated the qualities of the heart. Hence, a good, although weak man, is the object of our affection; whereas eminent intellectual ability, or any great and splendid qualification will *command* esteem, even when these are joined with it which excite detestation. Our author ought therefore to have said that esteem is allied to the passion of admiration, rather than to have brought love into his family group upon the present occasion. For the causes that produce the former are nearly the same indeed. But the latter, arising, as we have seen, from different sources, and distinguished by distinct expression and lineaments, bears no resemblance of either; nor lays any claim to relation. “But wit, and humour, says Mr H——, excite “love and affection.” What! does wit excite love? At this rate the celebrated Dean of St Patrick’s must have been the most amiable of all men: For he was undoubtedly one of the most witty. His pictures of Yahoos, and of Laputians are not destitute of the former quality. But of all our author’s paradoxes, that by which the tendency of these witty allusions is pointed out to conciliate love and affection to their author, is perhaps the most difficult of solution.

readily

readily conceive, that an attempt to prove that vice, in any sense of the term, can be beneficial to the community, and that sensual gratification is pardonable in all cases wherein it pleaseth the individual, must fail as much as the former of accomplishing its ultimate purpose, and for the same reason. But we have seen already, that scepticism may be produced by means that cannot impress conviction of any kind. The former purpose, metaphysical sophistry will bring about without difficulty in many cases. It ought however to be remembered, that although we may introduce uncertainty into the moral system, we cannot set bounds to it when it has been brought to take place. For the mind which becomes sceptical respecting the doctrines above enumerated, will entertain the same doubt concerning all other facts, however clear and explicit, that are placed before it. Universal scepticism, comprehending whatever is the subject of examination, must be brought in by him who saps in this manner "the broad foundations of all trust." And he who cannot enter into the proof of paradoxical theories, nor understand distinctions that are frivolous and inexplicable,

cable, will contemplate the world as a chaos in which all objects are huddled together without regularity; or as a dream whereof all the scenes, whether pleasing or disagreeable, are equally unsubstantial and evanescent.

We mentioned, as a second cause of scepticism, a desire to display acumen and powers of ratiocination, by rendering all points whatever the subjects of controversy. It is to this cause that Plato, in the celebrated dialogue entitled *Phedon*, ascribes the pyrrhonism of the times in which he lived. This disposition he speaks of as becoming prevalent among men who were unskilled in the art of just reasoning, and who engaged in conversation with sophists, whose business was to perplex and to darken all subjects without exception. When, says he, such a man detects, or conceives that he has detected the falsehood of a proposition which he believed to be true; or when it appears to him sometimes in one light, and sometimes in another in the course of his argumental contest; he comes at last to class himself among those whom scepticism has exalted to the summit of wisdom. He believes that no certainty

can be obtained either in reasons or in things, and that it is with the universe as with the euripus, in which all is in perpetual agitation, nor does any single state or temperament continue to be the same for a moment\*. Socrates proceeds to paint the deplorable situation of the sceptic in the subsequent part of the dialogue, and to lament the prevalence of that sophistical reasoning, or rather wrangling, which gives rise to this gloomy state of doubt and of uncertainty. Some attention to the manners and to the character of the times during which this great philosopher flourished, will satisfy us concerning the justice and propriety of his observation.

Greece, in the days of Plato and of Socra-

\* Επειδὴν τις πιστεύσει λόγῳ τινι ἀληθεῖ εἶναι, ἀνευ τῆς περὶ τοὺς λόγους τέχνης, καπεῖτα οὐλοῦν ὑπὲρ αὐτῷ δοξῇ ψευδὲς εἶναι, ἐπιστὲ μὲν ὧν, ἐπιστὲ δὲ ἔκ ὧν. Καὶ αὐτὸς ἕτερος καὶ ἕτερος. Καὶ μάλιστα δὴ οἱ περὶ τοὺς ἀντιλογικοὺς λόγους διατριψάντες, εἰθ' ὅτι τελευτῶντες οἰοῦνται σοφώτατοι γεγενῆσθαι τε καὶ κατανενοῦσθαι, οὐκ οἶσιν ὅτι οὔτε τῶν πραγμάτων οὐδὲν οὐκ οἶσιν, οὐδὲ βέλαιων ἔτε τῶν λόγων. Ἀλλὰ μὰ τὰ οὐρα ἀτεχνῶς ὥσπερ ἐν Εὐριπῷ ἀνω καὶ κάτω στρέφεται, καὶ χρόνον ὕδην ἐν ὕδην μέναι. ΠΛΑΤΩΝ. ΦΑΙΔ.

tes, was raised to the summit of glory, and derived advantages from the characteristical qualities of her various inhabitants; from the intercourse maintained betwixt her provinces, considered as parts of a great republic; from the nations assembled at her public games; and, finally, from that spirit of liberty, and the desire of glory which these games were calculated to excite and to reward, superior to those that were possessed by any other people. Our present business, however, is not so much to enlarge upon advantages with which no intelligent reader is unacquainted, as to point out some causes which obstructed at the same time the progress of this people in the science of philosophy, and which rendered their knowledge of divine truth obscure, and subservient to no valuable purpose.

Of those causes, the principal appears to have been that spirit of wrangling and of disputation which characterised men who were well received in all places, and who were known by the designation of SOPHISTS\*.

These

\* Before the times of Heraclides Ponticus, says Laer-

These men assuming the character of public instructors, and skilled in the art of wrangling, and of declaiming plausibly upon all subjects, travelled through the Greek cities, followed every where by admiring multitudes who received their false doctrines as the dictates of truth \*. From the account transmitted to us of those teachers by their contemporaries, and particularly by Plato, their great art seems to have lain in fascinating the ears of their auditors by inchanting

tius who taught that the epithet ΣΟΦΟΣ wise, belongs to GOD only, the science now called philosophy was termed ΣΟΦΙΑ wisdom; and those who professed to teach it were known by the appellation of ΣΟΦΟΙ wise men. Afterwards those men whose proficiency was really most considerable were denominated ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΟΙ or persons who loved wisdom, and who wished to acquire it. But the wise, the ΣΟΦΟΙ in their own estimation, the professional teachers of the art of gaining wisdom, we call, says he, ΣΟΦΙΣΤΑΙ or SOPHISTS. ΛΑΕΡ.

προοίμ.

\* Without multiplying authorities on this head, let us remark, that Plato, the great enemy of these false philosophers, has collected whatever is necessary to be known about them, in his dialogues, entitled, the Sophist, Gorgias, Hippias, Euthedeme, Protagoras; particularly in the last, to which we refer the reader for more compleat information.

allegories,



allegories, and by modulated language at the time when they inculcated maxims, agreeable to the passions, the prejudices, and the vanity of their disciples\*. To them the young and the inexperienced resorted with the purpose of gaining comprehensive knowledge. They were encouraged to propose questions on all points without distinction. They listened eagerly to disputations upon subjects of which they were by no means competent judges. And unable to comprehend the tedious declamations that were substituted in place of concise and forcible argument by professed controvertists, they learned the art of rendering every question obscure and intricate, from men whose business it was never to yield to an antagonist, or to make an acknowledgment of being in the wrong.

From this account of those pretended philosophers, it is obvious, that the first lesson

\* Of this kind is the subject of the Protagoras, that virtue consists of parts independent of each other, and can be taught. His allegory of Prometheus and of Epimetheus; of the formation of man, &c. by which he attempts to establish his doctrine, is specious, and indeed beautiful in a high degree.

which a young man was taught in their school was, that nothing is so clear as not to become, in the hands of a skilful disputant, the subject of controversy\*. This maxim lays the foundation of scepticism, towards which it may be denominated the first and most indispensable requisition. A second lesson, connected with the former, and arising from it, was, that he who makes the *most minute*

\* This was professedly the maxim of the sophist Protagoras, who, it must be confessed, carried the matter as far, if we can believe Seneca, as any of his predecessors or successors have ever done. “Protagoras ait de ‘omni re in utraque parte disputari posse ex æquo; et ‘de hac ipsa, an omnis res in utramque partem disputabilis sit?’” *Epist.* 88. But, with submission to Protagoras, these positions are inconsistent and contradictory. For, if all questions may be rendered the subjects of dispute without exception, there certainly can be no doubt that all questions are disputable, unless we will venture to say, that he who disputes is not disputing, and that a point which may be controverted with propriety is at the same time incontrovertible. Our author’s queritur, therefore, in the present instance, whether that proposition which may be a proper subject of disputation, can be disputable, is truly admirable. Let the reader observe from this specimen of his principles, the wretched shifts to which men of shrewdness and of sagacity are compelled to betake themselves, by the love of paradox, and of metaphysical distinction.

*distinction*

*distinctions* in the course of his contest displays the greatest sagacity and acuteness of intellect; and that these qualities are more conspicuous, as the subject of dispute is more clear and intelligible. When these principles are established, TRUTH may be said literally to be turned out of doors. For the purpose of the parties is no longer either to acquire useful knowledge of any kind, or to convey it. The question comes to be, who of the disputants is the most indefatigable wrangler, and who succeeds best in the noble arts of cavilling; and, if the term may be used with propriety, of creating perplexity. Of this conduct the consequence is obvious. The young hearer, finding difficulties to arise upon all hands which would never have occurred to him, and remarking at the same time, that the parties in the case before us were solicitous to render themselves, and not their arguments, the objects of his attention, departed with perplexed notions of the subject of their controversy, which he had formerly understood. In this manner he was led to judge concerning complex propositions as of those plain maxims which he had considered as being perfectly intelligible. And thus he arrived  
at

at last at that state of total suspense, of which the pleasures are only known to certain adepts in philosophy; and which Plato, in the passage already quoted, so emphatically delineates.

Our illustrations of the present cause of scepticism have been principally drawn from ancient writers, because we wish not, without necessity, to confirm our remarks by modern authorities, which many of our readers hold perhaps in as high estimation as that wherein the hearers of Protagoras held his declamations. Without having recourse to those authorities, let us sum up our observations upon the preceding causes of sceptical fluctuation, with the sentiments of a celebrated ancient philosopher, which cannot be unacceptable to any reader. And the intelligent may substitute in place of the names collected by my author, those of modern sceptics of the last and present century, of whom he may deem the principles to be characteristical. “Audi quantum mali facit  
 “nimia subtilitas, et quam infesta veritati  
 “sit! Protagoras ait de omni re disputari  
 “posse, &c. Nausiphanes ait ex his quae  
 “videntur

“ videntur esse, nihil magis, esse quam non  
 “ esse. Parmenides ait, ex his quae videntur  
 “ nihil esse in universum. Zeno eleatis  
 “ omnia negotia de negotiis dejicit; ait nihil  
 “ esse. Circa eadem fere, pyrrhonii versan-  
 “ tur, et megarici, et eretrici, et academici  
 “ qui novam induxerunt scientiam, nihil  
 “ scire. *Haec omnia in illum supervacuum studio-*  
 “ *rum liberalium gregem conjici.* Si Protago-  
 “ rae credo, nihil in rerum natura est nisi  
 “ *dubium*; si Naufiphani hoc unum certum  
 “ est, nihil esse certi; si Parmenidi, nihil est  
 “ praeter unum; si Zenoni, ne unum qui-  
 “ dem. Quid ergo nos sumus? Quid ista  
 “ quae nos circumstant, alunt sustinent?  
 “ Tota rerum natura UMBRA est, aut inanis,  
 “ aut fallax.” *Senec. ubi sup.*

Such then was the effect of metaphysical  
 subtlety carried professedly into all subjects,  
 among men who wanted the light of revela-  
 tion. What shall we say concerning those  
 who follow their track in modern times?  
 Whether or not these gentlemen have substi-  
 tuted better and more practicable theories in  
 place of doctrines which they profess to re-  
 probate, and how far the subtleties of mo-  
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modern sceptics tend more directly than the sophisms of their predecessors, to promote the cause of truth, of science, or of virtue, the reader who may chuse to judge from comparison will determine with greatest accuracy.

We suggested, as a powerful cause of the prevalence of scepticism, the influence of bad example co-operating with the love of pleasure to seduce a mind originally tinctured with good principles, but led into error by the impetuosity of passion. But, it will be said, is not the purpose of education to form the mind to the love and practice of virtue? Should this point be granted, it will follow, that an education calculated to produce such an effect, must represent virtue as a substantial reality, producing the greatest and most universal emolument to mankind. And of religious instruction we may pronounce in the same manner, that its objects are truths essentially important, worthy to be placed clearly before the understanding, and to be impressed upon the heart. Whence then is it that a man thus tutored may fall into scepticism, the very evil against which it is the ob-  
vious

vious tendency of this education to guard him most effectually, more readily than into a general and settled incredulity, to which there are so many powerful inducements? Let us observe, that this danger ariseth from that opposition which he will discover to take place betwixt the precepts of the gospel, in-joining the observance of certain duties, and the suggestions of his own passions, prompting him to violate these sanctions, by complying with the fashions and with the practice of the times. Desires that are unfavourable to the principles of this man's education will be excited by the licentious conduct of those with whom he may associate. What is the consequence? He begins to wish that he could give scope as freely as his companions to the indulgence of passion and of appetite; and in his procedure he is led naturally to question the authority that opposeth to this indulgence a rigid prohibition. Doubt and diffidence take place, therefore, in this manner, of his former confidence and chearful acquiescence. A gloom is spread over all his enjoyments; and his passions, stimulated by the remonstrances of his companions, as well as by their practice, may weaken a faith

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which

which they cannot eradicate. Of the causes, however, that give rise to this forlorn state of doubt and of uncertainty, we may remark, that the present is in the least degree productive of bad consequences, at least of such which will be stable and permanent. For the sceptical spirit, that is excited by passion and by example, will most probably subside as the influence of those causes becomes weaker and less universal. When the passion shall be tempered by age, or the example rendered inefficacious by experience, an impartial retrospect will restore original prepossessions in favour of the moral precepts of Christianity to their former empire over the mind, which will thus be recalled from the labyrinth into which it has deviated.

But may not habits be acquired before the commencement of this season, which it will be difficult, if not impossible, to subdue at the time when their effect becomes conspicuous? Without doubt this may be the case, and frequently is such in the present instance. At the same time we may remark, that settled habits of any kind will be less characteristic of the genuine sceptic, than  
they



they will be either of him whose life is regulated by principle, or who has substituted in place of it the impulse of passion. It was formerly observed, that the confirmed infidel, who leads a bad life, but who is *perfectly* convinced that there is no state of future retribution (should there be such a man), enjoys a tranquillity of which he cannot be said to participate who fluctuates in anxious suspense and apprehension. Yet of the latter class of men we must acknowledge, that they will not plunge into the torrent of vice with so much impetuosity, nor will they persevere in their course with the same steady resolution, as the former. Their actions varying between the extremes of virtue and of vice, and their resolutions formed with apprehension, and executed with timidity, will present the image of a mind wavering betwixt hope and fear, and unable, in consequence of its irresolution, to carry plans of licentious indulgence regularly into execution.

From this representation, however, we must not conclude, either that these men will be less offensive members of society than the first mentioned class, or that their actions will

be less detrimental. For he whose variable conduct indicates internal inquietude and irresolution, may be impelled to greater excess at some times by the impulse of passion, than that man who, by persevering inflexibly in one course, preserves a regular uniformity. A mind of which the desires are habitually gratified, will be undoubtedly more tranquil than that which upon many occasions checks and controuls their impetuosity. Its passions, therefore, breaking out in all directions, will upon the whole perhaps be productive of less pernicious effects, than when they act by sudden and by violent irruptions. It is with these blind guides, when they are restrained by considerations of a doubtful nature, as with a stream repelled by a bulwark of disproportioned strength. The tide may be pent up, and the passion may be bounded for a season by the mound opposed to their influence. But both, instead of being diverted into a new channel, will break down the barriers by which they are obstructed. And to repair the breach without laying a new foundation, will be to labour only to the purpose of being anew disappointed.

Our observations upon the influence of passion and of example as causes of scepticism would be incomplete, should we not attempt, before we quit this branch of our subject, to suggest reflections that may counteract their operation.

That you may be guarded, therefore, my young reader, against the effects of these powerful inducements to licentious indulgence, you ought to check this disposition to doubt concerning truths of which the evidence was formerly satisfactory, at the time of its commencement, by considering at the same time the original and the tendency of this new propension. No questions can possibly be of greater importance than those respecting the principles of morals, because they have the most immediate relation to the happiness or the misery of the individual. It is therefore of the utmost importance that you should determine the question, whether you are induced by rational motives to doubt concerning principles which you cannot abandon without sacrificing the most interesting hopes, and the most delightful enjoyments; or whether you have been prompted,

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ed, in the first instance, by the stimulus of passion, and by the power of example. When you are thrown into a certain track of observation, this point may be decided without difficulty. Distinctions of which you cannot perceive the propriety, that are calculated to annihilate moral virtues by rendering them mere shadows and resemblances, would not surely shake your belief of propositions received upon examination, was it not that prejudice and passion have paved the way to the temporary subversion of your former opinions, and that you are prepossessed in behalf of principles which your new guides suggest to be beneficial.

Our remarks on this subject, in the preceding part of this section, have tended to show the point to which these leaders in the last resort will conduct your inquiries. Let us grant, that a proneness to hesitate, and to weigh a matter or maxim upon all sides before pronouncing a decision, is natural to a creature endowed with such limited faculties as those of man, and terminated by such scanty boundaries. You ought to be aware, that one step beyond the just medium which

is an object of approbation, will lead to the extremes of error, temerity, and folly. You are told, for instance, that Christianity contains doctrines that are revealed to man by the Supreme Being. As an evidence of this affirmation, you are farther informed, that the tendency of its precepts and institutions is to render virtue amiable, as being productive of happiness, and vice detested, as the source of misery and confusion. You require that this proposition concerning the effect of Christian doctrines should be established by proof; and you examine this proof, when it is placed before you, with scrupulous attention and impartiality. Thus far your hesitation is rational, and your request is naturally suggested by the occasion. But should you proceed a step further in this question, and, instead of expressing doubt respecting the tendency of the laws above mentioned, should fluctuate in your notions of the general purposes of virtue and of vice, all argument and all information are at an end. Your experience, and your sense of right and wrong, must determine your belief of this matter. Reasoning, therefore, upon the subject, which is founded upon the supposition  
that

that both are deficient, must fail of impressing permanent conviction upon the mind. The self-sufficiency of virtue to all good purposes is the great maxim of Pagan philosophy, as being unquestionably evident; and is significantly expressed in the well-known sentence, ΑΡΕΤΗ ΑΥΤΑΡΚΗΣ.

It has been our purpose to evince, in the preceding sections of this work, that a principal cause of modern scepticism is the rejection of revealed religion. With this end, we have proved, not by general observations only respecting the absurd schemes which those who reject Christianity have substituted in place of it, but by an actual comparison of these with each other, that he who renounces the clear and explicit doctrines of revelation, will search in vain for consistence, or for uniformity of any kind in the writings of its adversaries \*. For the opinions of these men, different and even opposite upon points of which they maintain that all mankind form the same judgment, and their estimates of an universal religion, of which they are scarcely agreed in any one principle, present

\* *Vide supra, sect. 4. p. 114. to the end.*

to an intelligent mind a just view of human imperfection, and exhibit, when taken together, decisive evidence of the expedience and necessity of revelation.

They exhibit a proof that revelation was necessary. A more powerful evidence of this truth cannot indeed be adduced, than that which arises from the incongruous schemes of the wise and the learned in all ages, who have professed to set it aside. To these gentlemen, a reader of common intelligence might address the following expostulation with much propriety upon the present occasion. "You maintain that a revelation of truths calculated to regulate practice, or to extend knowledge, is unnecessary, because the principles necessary to the first purpose are impressed upon every mind by the Author of nature, and reason can discover as much respecting the last as is fit or necessary to be known. Now, if this is the case, no question ought to be more easy of solution than the simple one suggested by this affirmation: What are these universal principles? By what fatality then has it happened, that you have never yet agreed in your enumeration

of points, at the same time so obvious and so essential? When I consider the Christian scheme, I do not discover any incongruity respecting the articles above mentioned, similar to that of which your writings offer examples. The authors of the sacred volumes agree perfectly with each other in their account of the great objects of faith, and of the general rules and principles of duty. No dispute takes place amongst them with respect to the existence of a moral sense, the propriety of a moral precept, the intrinsic excellence and beauty of virtue, and the nature, extent, and duration of its reward. The great doctrines of future existence and retribution are clearly and particularly inculcated and enforced by all the authors of the New Testament without exception. They form the basis of the Christian's faith, and are held up as objects, by the contemplation of which he ought at all times to be supported and animated.

“ When from these books I turn to the writings of ancient and of modern philosophers, I find parties established whose tenets respecting the most important of all subjects, that



that of morals, differ widely from each other. I remark particularly concerning the latter class who reject revelation, that they have laid down no fixed plan of any kind whatever, to be adopted by their followers, in place of its doctrines. On the contrary, the perfections of the supreme Being, and even his existence, the principles of morals, and their utility, the nature of virtue, and its tendency to promote happiness, and, finally, the reality, the properties, and the state of invisible and incorporeal beings, are points upon each of which incongruous opinions are maintained by different authors, concerning whose hypotheses I can pronounce no judgment, but that they cannot be reconciled. From my examination of these, therefore, and from a comparison of them with the former, I am led to conclude, that a revelation from the Deity was necessary, in order to render our ideas just and comprehensive of objects, to the knowledge of which the most enlightened understanding was utterly inadequate. And from the consistent representation which Christian authors exhibit of doctrines wherein they only maintain uniformity of sentiment, I form an argument favourable

to their pretensions of publishing a revelation from God."

The proof adduced in the former part of this inquiry has, we hope, given abundant satisfaction respecting both the capital points above mentioned. The consequence is obvious. He who adheres to the Christian scheme, entertains explicit ideas of the nature of his duty, and of the Being who prescribes it, confirmed by the uniform sentiments of all the authors who profess to write from inspiration. He, on the other hand, who rejects this religion, renouncing a theory thus illustrated and established by consent, must either wander in eternal uncertainty, amidst opinions and tenets infinitely multiplied; or must adhere to the notions of one leader, controverted and reprobated by others of the same party; or, finally, he must frame a new system to himself, of whose perfection, in opposition to so many others, he will find it difficult to obtain a conviction. Scepticism, therefore, in the last resort, will most probably be his refuge. For no system of principles; after having dismissed those of Christianity,

anity, will come recommended by sufficient authority to establish his belief.

We have now enumerated the general causes of the prevalence of sceptical notions; and we have endeavoured to place in a just point of view, the effects respecting the happiness of the individual, and his conduct in society, to which these notions will give occasion. In the present section, as in every other part of this work, the author has particularly kept in view the situation of young persons entering into life, and ready to be seduced from a plain path by the united influence of prejudice, of passion, and of example. With the purpose of doing service to this class of readers in particular, he would address to them one other observation on the causes of scepticism, and on its effects. He makes it with greater satisfaction and confidence, because it may be comprehended without difficulty. It respects the end or design which our modern Pyrrhonists propose to accomplish by their theories.

Methinks I hear a sagacious observer, after having listened to all that these philosophers

phers plead in behalf of their opinions, applying to them a few questions and remarks of the following or similar import. "You require me to doubt concerning the truth of all propositions that are not established by unquestionable evidence \*. But what propositions, according to your scheme, are established by the proof which you require? All reasoning must be founded upon certain postulates, or fixed principles, of which sense or perception must determine the reality. Should your universal doubt comprehend those principles, I shall be glad to know what instruction you propose to communicate. For, to be sceptical without any prospect of obtaining certainty, *i. e.* to doubt merely for the sake of doubting, is an effort of philosophical resignation to which I find myself unequal. You, gentlemen, are my guides and my preceptors. By what light is my course to be directed, and to what point do you propose to conduct my research? Is it to the knowledge of any positive truth, of which neither sense nor reason are the judges? Or must I pass my life in the noble occupation of pursuing objects, in imitation of certain

\* *Hume's Sceptic. Ess. vol. 2.*

ancient philosophers, respecting which I can never determine the question ; whether they are real or apparent \* ? Let me estimate my profit and loss before I launch out into this sea of uncertainty, on which I am to steer my course without the assistance of a pilot or of a compass. Of what companions am I to be deprived, and what loss am I to sustain in my voyage to the land of shadows and of appearances ?

“ I have examined your various theories with impartiality, and with dispassionate attention. You tell me either that I must part from my ancient friends, sense and reason, or at least that I must distrust both, as being guides by whom I have been fascinated and misled in many important circumstances. My eyes and my ears, according to your notions, bring me false intelligence ; and you place before me a mirror in which all external objects appear to be unsubstantial ima-

\* Οὗτοι πάντες ΠΥΡΡΩΝΕΙΟΙ μὲν ἀπὸ τοῦ Διδάσκειου ἀπορητικοὶ δὲ καὶ ΣΚΕΠΤΙΚΟὶ προσηγορεύσαντο. Σκεπτικὴ φιλοσοφία ἀπὸ τοῦ ΣΚΕΠΤΕΣΘΑΙ Αἰεὶ, καὶ ΜΗΔΕΠΟΤΕ Εὐρίσκειν. ΛΑΕΡΓ. ΠΥΡΡ.

ges of things that never had existence. As a compensation for the loss of so many sources of satisfaction, what information do you propose to communicate? You console me amidst the excruciating tortures of the stone or rheumatism, by acquainting me, that of what I *feel*, as of what I see or hear, nothing is *real*, and that to complain of an *apparent evil* is beneath the dignity of a philosopher. You tell me, when I show you a hurt occasioned by having stumbled against a pillar, that my skull has only encountered an idea. You assure me, that my soul may be material or immaterial, conscious or unintelligent, existent or not existent, responsible or not responsible for its actions, for any thing that you know to the contrary. In short you inform me that I have launched upon an ocean of eternal uncertainty and fluctuation, terminated by no boundary : And that, at the time when I form any positive conclusion concerning the things or the ideas, the substances or the shadows which are passing before me ; at that instant I lose all claim to the envied and dignified appellation of a philosophical sceptic."

How

How different from this scene is that exhibited by the precepts, principles, and example of the divine Author of our religion ! A principal part of his work seems to have been the design of publishing clear, as well as salutary truths, to mankind. And he who has perused the gospels with attention, cannot fail to have remarked, that he speaks at all times with a precision, as well as with an authority, concerning the great tenets of religion, which forbid us to believe that he entertained the least suspicion respecting their truth or stability. “ The words, said he, that “ I speak, THEY are SPIRIT, and THEY “ are LIFE.”

## S E C T. X.

### *Of the Effect of Action upon Principle.*

PHILOSOPHERS have been employed during many ages, in explaining the influence of principle upon action. We propose in this section, to invert the proposition, by examining what effect action exerts upon principle. Let us leave therefore for the

present the patrons of infidelity and of scepticism, and the arts by which they have ever been solicitous to render themselves the objects of general imitation. Let us listen to the voice of “the power within the mind;” by considering the love of pleasure carried to the extreme of criminal gratification, as a cause of those evils, without the co-operation of which the arts that have been enumerated and exemplified in the preceding sections must have proved unsuccessful. Men who have adopted loose opinions of religious truth at first, perhaps without much reflection, and whom motives of imagined interest have excited afterwards to perseverance, must be convinced by recollection, that the boundaries of right and wrong will be adjusted improperly at a tribunal where the *passions* are constituted judges. It will therefore become such men, in their cooler moments, to give *the sentence of this court*, to which perhaps they have hitherto submitted implicitly, a serious and impartial review.

Ye votaries of pleasure, who are induced by your dread of futurity, to take shelter under



der the comfortable shade of annihilation ! Ye sons of infidelity and of scepticism, who have ingeniously reasoned yourselves out of all religion, because you cannot find one that will countenance your actions ! To you I address myself upon the present occasion. Let me not be contemplated by you as an officious and impertinent monitor, who would obtrude upon you gloomy ideas in the moment of extatic gratification. I am ambitious of being viewed as a friend, who would approach towards you during the intervals of your enjoyment ; and, at the instant when you sigh from satiety, who would call your attention to objects which novelty may render acceptable.

You are returned then I will suppose from a party of pleasure, in which, among other subjects of entertainment, you have touched lightly upon the religion of your country. This religion you have disrobed of its false decoration, by trying it upon *the touch-stone of ridicule*. And the folly of its priest-ridden devotees hath alternately exercised your pity, sharpened your wit, and ineffably heightened the joy of mutual congratulation. Feeling

however that depression and lassitude by which high enjoyment is naturally succeeded, or being reminded perhaps by an inward and irresistible monitor of mortality, you are ready in the hour of vapourish despondency, to adopt the language of a *great man*, and therefore of a personage worthy of imitation in similar circumstances.

“ Suppose I should be damned at last,  
 “ when I have never thought a syllable about  
 “ the matter. I have often laughed and  
 “ made a jest about it, and yet it may be  
 “ true for any thing which I know to the  
 “ contrary. I wish I was certainly satisfied,  
 “ after all, that when a man is dead there is  
 “ an end of him ; for there are some men of  
 “ learning, as I have heard, of a different  
 “ opinion. If there be no other world, why  
 “ I shall be in no other condition than a  
 “ block or a stone. But if there *should*.”—  
 Now let me suppose, that instead of imitating the noble and truly heroic conduct of *Jonathan Wild the GREAT* upon this occasion, you should be disposed to examine the reasons upon which your belief of certain consolatory doctrines is founded ; and that  
 your

your ear should be open for a moment to admonitions that are professedly salutary ; in this case, I presume to address to you the following observations.

It is, you know, an acknowledged truth, that the characters and manners of individuals, receive a peculiar impression from those of the age in which they are born, and of the persons with whom they associate. When therefore the age wherein a young man of strong passions, and of adequate sensibility, happens to live, is licentious and dissipated ; such a man, enjoying independence when he sets out in the world, will be ready to plunge, perhaps somewhat precipitately, into a tide on which he remarks that so many of his companions are embarked. You are professed lovers of the social circle, in which you have spent many a joyous hour, surrounded with the children of pleasure, and intoxicated with the nectar of felicity. By having been initiated early into certain mysteries, habits of indulgence have been contracted, of which the principles of your education do not induce you to approve,

prove, and to which the voice of reason cannot be brought to correspond.

But it is not perhaps only in the circle of your companions, that you have observed the love of pleasure and of dissipation to take the lead. An examination of other societies hath convinced you, that the practice of your own is authorised by example. Not satisfied even with this view, you have taken a larger compass of objects within your inspection. You have contemplated men in the middle, and still more particularly in the higher walks of life; and the result of your inquiry hath been, that your own little community is established by the maxims, and is conformed to the manners of the times. To those who are greatest proficient in the school of sensuality, you hear the flattering titles of fine gentlemen, free and liberal spirits, joyous companions, men of wit and of fashion, &c. universally applied. On the other hand, you are accustomed to see the few, who by persevering obstinately in an opposite course, circumscribe the indulgence of passion and of appetite; either despised as being simpletons, exposed as zealots, or detested

detested as specious and insinuating hypocrites.

It is needless to enlarge upon a known truth, which it may yet be proper to mention upon the present occasion, that the nature of truth and of falsehood is not affected by the actions of men, of which they are wholly independent. It is still equally true, that opinion respecting those great objects is impressed by the general practice of mankind ; and that he who would regulate his judgment of men and things by the standard of reason, ought to suspect the equity of that decision to which his passions give a hasty and tumultuous approbation.

Let me suppose, gentlemen, that you have considered this matter coolly and impartially as I have placed it before you. Granting that it has been justly stated, say, Whether there is not danger, that a young man, stimulated at the same time by his passions, and by his companions, may be induced to embrace principles that are prescribed by his actions, and not by his understanding, as being eligible in his situation ? In other words,

words, inquire whether the religion, with the authority and institutions of which you are dissatisfied, would not have been the object of your choice, as much as it is that of your disapprobation, had those institutions which form essential parts of it been as favourable to the indulgence of vice, as they really are to the interest of virtue? Prompted by inclination, and tainted by the contagion of example in early life, you stand up in defence of bad actions. Why? Because you cannot resolve against a repetition of them. The process by which you are misled is simple and natural. You *feel* that the temptation gathers strength from your compliance with it. You remark, that this criminal compliance is strictly prohibited by the Author of our religion, and by his apostles. You have therefore listened to the representations of men who tell you, that this religion was not promulgated by divine authority, and that these teachers of righteousness were impostors.

Is it by such a process as this that your opinions have been influenced? Surely then it may be worth while to review them seriously,

ously, that they may not become fixed principles, of which habit, prejudice, and perhaps pride, will afterwards prevent you from calling in question the stability. At the time when reason discovers the pernicious effects of a certain mode of conduct, does she not call upon you to re-examine the arguments by which you have attempted to establish its rectitude? Does not this monitor adopt the language of the Patriarch, applied surely in the present instance with propriety : “ Who can bring a clean thing out  
“ of an unclean ?”

Let us suppose, therefore, that the dangerous influence of the love of pleasure in the choice of principle is felt and is acknowledged. A question in which young persons are deeply interested, is, By what means may this influence be most effectually counteracted? In answer to this question, it will be proper to lay down rules by which action ought to be regulated, because the present subject leads us to consider it as the parent of principle. Our remarks on this point, will introduce observations in the latter part of

the section on the important doctrine of religious education.

With respect to the first point, we may observe, that the fatal effects of the love of pleasure will be combated most successfully by him, who, passing over intermediate steps, considers those to whom every licentious indulgence is familiar. In the same manner, the influence of this passion on the choice of principle, will be suppressed most effectually by those who examine the arguments which the advocates of sensual indulgence employ in its behalf, apart from the embellishments wherewith imagination is captivated, and from pleas by which the ruling passion is soothed into acquiescence.

It is an observation familiar to intelligent readers, that few men shake off every restraint of principle when they first set out in the world. The power of education is exerted for some time with efficacy, and, in the progress of vice, the mind makes flow, and often imperceptible approaches towards an ultimate end. To a young person entering upon this career, they who have advanced only



a few steps beyond himself may be objects of envy ; but to the last stage of abandoned profligacy, he will look forward with horror. Shocked, instead of being convinced by reasonings, of which it is the purpose to justify criminal actions of the worst kind, his resolution against the practice of such transgressions will at first be sincere. In this situation, a young person will be guarded most effectually against vices that are the most destructive, by looking back upon those which he has already committed, and which habit hath rendered pleasing and attractive. To the extreme, from the view of which he recoils, he will perceive that many gradations will convey him imperceptibly. He will remark, that passions gratified by every successive deviation, will suppress the remonstrances of impartial reason. He will be convinced, that, in place of the barrier opposed by Christianity to the indulgence of appetite, he has substituted no intrenchment of any kind to obstruct its efforts. Schemes that are calculated to justify all actions indiscriminately ; rules, by the observance of which faith and mutual confidence must be dissolved ; pleas in behalf of vice and of er-

ror, by which internal consciousness, and the dread of chastisement either here or hereafter, are deprived of efficacy, he will consider as means which lead to disease, infamy, scorn, dependence, the contempt of the proud, the pity of the virtuous, and the *still* voice of secret but unceasing reproach.

That these are not imaginary consequences of the plans above mentioned, experience will testify even to a superficial observer. He therefore, who, stopping in the middle of his course, shall be induced to reject the specious fallacies of sophistical reasoners from a view of their consequences, will have ascertained happiness to himself by a proper application of the powers of reflection. *Nemo repente fuit turpissimus*, is a maxim founded on universal testimony. And it is with him who has shaken off the restraint of first principles, as with the traveller who has wandered from the right path in his journey. Every seeming resemblance of the objects which he beholds to those which he wisheth to contemplate, will be improved into a perfect correspondence. To the point, likewise, from which he deviated, while he is misled by this  
imagined

imagined resemblance, it will become every moment more difficult to return.

We observed, that the love of pleasure may be prevented from influencing the choice of principles, by an examination of the arguments that are employed to justify sensual gratification, considered apart from the embellishment that captivates imagination in the writings of certain philosophers, and from the pleas that are addressed to the passions : The preceding sections of this work are thrown together, with the general purpose of evincing the importance and the effect of this conduct. In these I have endeavoured to place the specious reasonings of those writers in the just point of light, and to show, by opposing their schemes to each other, that they are inconsistent as well as irrational.

Without help of this kind, many circumstances will render it difficult to conduct such an examination with just impartiality. To distinguish plausible representation from conclusive argument, at the time when the mind suffers from the remembrance of a bad action which it wisheth to justify, is an effort

fort not easily or speedily to be accomplished. It will likewise be said, that a young man, plunged perhaps most commonly into scenes of riot and of dissipation, is peculiarly unfit to carry it properly into execution. Even granting that his understanding should be adequate to such a research, and his attention fixed by it, his judgment may yet be warped by passions which come to maturity, while the intellectual powers are gaining vigour and energy. Whatever melts and captivates the heart, whatever plays before and dazzles imagination, whatever coincides with the predominant inclination, and flatters the mind in a present pursuit, are calculated to gratify the young and inexperienced. Reasonings, therefore, which even in a grateful cause would have failed to make a lasting impression, as not being enforced with energy, must be wholly inefficacious, when the end is perceived to be disagreeable, and when the means that lead to it are improperly selected and applied.

These objections are no doubt well founded. At the same time, they are by no means unanswerable. It is true, that a young man  
engaged

engaged in the busy scenes of life, or immersed in its pleasures, will not be inclined to investigate theories, or to follow out arguments in which he does not find some part of that pleasure of which he is in search. While he is in search of pleas by which bad actions may be vindicated, no performance of which the tendency is opposite can give him satisfaction. But a young person, whose understanding is not thus prostituted, and who is capable to relish the beauties of composition, will find a pleasure in works that are distinguished by these beauties, which may produce a very happy effect. The union of the useful and the agreeable, is unquestionably necessary, as much in composition as in conversation or in teaching, to promote the great purpose of edification. Of these, although the latter is always acceptable, even when it conveys opinions that are false or pernicious, yet the native simplicity of the former will be ineffectual of itself to fix attention, or to conciliate general regard. Thus it has happened, that many excellent works have perished in consequence of a desire attracted solely to the purpose of utility. Men of discernment have, on the other hand,

observed

observed with regret, that superficial as well as irreligious writings, in which specious declamation supplies the place of argument, have, by this circumstance alone, been recommended to popular esteem. But difficult as it may be to obtain both ends in the conduct of a work, experience hath shown, that this purpose is not impracticable. And we may surely say with truth, that if those excellencies characterise writings that are favourable to licentious practice, they ought to impress performances more obviously of which the purpose is opposite. For, as this purpose cannot be acceptable to many readers, the aspect of an unpromising subject, like that of a forbidding countenance, should be softened by graces which are ever pleasing and attractive.

Our observations on this subject are not meant to imply censure on the writings of Christian divines and apologists, as being deficient in those essential characters. It is certain, that as much as some performances of such authors, of which the arguments are conclusive, betray the want of this external ornament, as much do other works on the  
same

same subject exhibit a striking combination of both.

Of our young readers, we do not suppose that the greater number ought to be classed among triflers, who may be soothed by flattery into any belief, and who are decoyed by the tinsel of superficial ornament. It is to those who have intervals of reflection, in which they wish to think for themselves upon points of the most essential importance, that this discourse is addressed. We have evinced, in the preceding sections, by examples drawn from admired performances on the side of infidelity, that plausible theories are not always fitted to stand the test of close examination. And we have shown, that the fantastic colours of ridicule are employed as often to disfigure just and beautiful objects, as to distinguish real from seeming excellence. With *truth*, therefore, my young friends, when it sparkles in your eye, amidst the rubbish of unpleasing sentiments, and of uncouth phraseology, you ought to act in the same manner as a skilful jeweller would with a rough diamond offered to him by a man of a mean and unpromising aspect.

Without bestowing attention upon frivolous and adventitious circumstances, you must consider the jewel apart from the dross, and value it according to its intrinsic excellence. False and unworthy notions of religious truth may be obtruded upon your view, in the same way as a false diamond may be presented and accepted instead of a true one. But habitual attention will supply the means of detection as certainly in one case as in the other. And you will acknowledge, that the end is of importance to justify the experiment.

On the present subject it is only proper to observe farther, that the influence of action upon principle will be discerned and prevented most readily, by directing attention to its earliest influence, and to the mode in which it operates. Of this influence the first effect will be a desire to hear whatever can be said in justification of certain actions, and a proportional dislike of the contrary. The bias of inclination will be perceived in this conduct, which the least reflection must discover to be irrational. From a rejection of certain precepts of our religion, as being improper and rigorous, or of certain doctrines,



as being above understanding, the step is easy to the reprobation of all. Whatever judgment, therefore, a man may form concerning particular points of faith, or rules of conduct, he ought to be cautious of rejecting in any instance the former as irrational, or the latter as inadequate, from the impulsive force of any predominant desire. Examination in the former case ought to precede rejection, and the first dictates of passion to be suppressed in the latter. If a man's circumstances or education shall disqualify him to enter into abstracted disquisition, his faith in laws that are adapted to all situations, ought to regulate his belief of doctrines which are derived from one source with those laws, and are promulgated by the same authority. He, on the other hand, who casts off Christianity because it is too perfect a standard of duty, and who desires to hear only what is said in opposition to it, ought to reflect that his passions prompt him to reject the religion on account of the most evident signatures of its divinity.

But it is, after all, in the first impressions which are made upon the mind, that we must

find a counterbalance to the succeeding violence and precipitancy of the passions. That we may therefore do justice to this subject in all its extent, it is proper here to resume the consideration of a point that hath already been touched upon; the extent and efficacy of religious education.

Reflection upon the present point will enable us to distinguish from each other three orders of men, upon whose minds the example and the arguments of our modern freethinkers will produce very different effects. The first class consists of men who have been trained up in the knowledge of the genuine doctrines of Christianity upon an enlarged plan, of which universal charity may be denominated the foundation. The second is of those whose knowledge of this religion hath been circumscribed, and who, instead of confuting the reasoning of an adversary, have been taught to hate him personally, as being heretical and impious. To the third order they may be said to belong whose education hath been neglected, and whom examples of universal depravity have seduced into imitation. Of men thus circum-

stanced,

stanced, we will venture to pronounce, that Deism will boast of few sincere or steady votaries in the first mentioned class. And those of the last order, before habits have become incurably fixed, it will not be impracticable to reclaim. It is therefore from men of the second rank, among whom education has not been neglected, but has been conducted injudiciously, that the worst consequences may be apprehended. The following observations will serve to confirm the truth of this remark.

The love of pleasure, in the same manner as other propensions, is implanted in the heart for the best purposes; And to such purposes, under proper regulations, this passion may be rendered subservient. A serious attempt to repel its exertions universally, must ever be abortive, because every individual is conscious of its power and efficacy. Instead, therefore, of eradicating this principle, a judicious tutor ought to treat it as an enemy whom we cannot subdue, by endeavouring to divert its force, and to employ it usefully. This end will be accomplished most successfully where religion

is concerned, by placing before the mind such just and moderate views of Christian doctrines and precepts, which may tend upon the whole to captivate, rather than to alarm the heart, or to repress its first and most natural effusions. A benevolent man will engage in a task of this nature with much satisfaction, as being suited to his disposition. We have already evinced, that, in the doctrines of the New Testament, he will find many that are peculiarly suited to his purpose\*.

At the time when the genuine excellence of Christian precepts is thus displayed, it will be proper to represent even an approach towards immoral practice, as being prohibited by them. Upon this occasion, a young person ought to be made thoroughly sensible of the reasonableness and propriety of the precepts, that he may discern nothing in them that breathes of compulsive authority. As much as the mind rejects what comes enforced, merely by an absolute command, as much does it yield with readiness to laws of which the reason and nature are explained clearly

\* Sect. 3. *pass.*

and without partiality. It ought likewise to be observed, that, bad as is the human heart, there are certain virtues which it always contemplates with unfeigned approbation. Among these, we may without question assign the first place to that noble expansion of thought in behalf of mankind in general, which the sacred writers dignify by the appellation of *Charity*. They who would circumscribe this universal sentiment within narrow boundaries, ought to be viewed as men whose powers have been warped from their original bias by peculiar circumstances. Reason, when we raise our thoughts to the common Father of his creatures, points out the *whole family* as objects of his paternal indulgence. A religion, therefore, will ever be introduced with advantage, of which charity is shown to be a fundamental principle.

In the conduct of education, a judicious instructor will judge it farther necessary to indulge his pupil in every innocent gratification, and to forbid no enjoyment of which he does not show that reason, as well as scripture, points out the impropriety. This procedure, by divesting religion of whatever  
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is austere and forbidding, will render it an object not only of approbation, but of choice. The duties which it prescribes, will be performed in this case, not as a task that is postponed from indolence, begun with reluctance, and only concluded with satisfaction; but as rational exercises from which the man returns with the serene consciousness of mental approbation to his employments in life. Christian duties, arising from love to the universal Parent, will be considered as a scheme of which the branches are dependent upon a common original. And in ascertaining their various purposes and tendency, the mind will proceed without embarrassment or constraint.

While obedience is thus rendered pleasing from the principles of our religion, its important discoveries, and sublime rewards, by being placed before the mind, will influence some of the most powerful passions of human nature, curiosity, and hope. A young person ought to be informed, that, in the series of ancient teachers and philosophers, the sacred writers are the only instructors of mankind who maintain, with uniform con-

fistence;

sistence, the doctrines of future existence and retribution. This state, which the mind contemplates with an *anxious* satisfaction (if we may thus term it), is brought to light by the Author of our religion and by his followers, as whose scheme the belief of it forms the clearest and most essential article. Taught, therefore, to look forward with confidence to such an object, young persons will receive a prepossession in behalf of the religion that holds it up to observation, which cannot afterwards be effaced.

*Quo semel est imbuta, recens servabit odorem  
Testa diu.*

Of all the tenets which the adversaries of our religion attempt to propagate, that of total dissolution is the least acceptable. And the belief of it is likewise calculated to have the worst influence on practice. In opposition, therefore, to the doubt and despondency which overspread the mind, according to their hypothesis, the explicit declarations of scripture upon this point are adapted to animate hope, and to regulate conduct by the dread of punishment and by the expectation

of reward. Every good man will wish to encourage principles of such powerful and universal efficacy, by rendering them subservient to the practice of virtue. This end is effectuated more immediately by the Christian than by any other scheme, on account of the unanimity wherewith its authors inculcate a doctrine of which the effects are so beneficial. The reward, therefore, of virtuous perseverance, and the punishment of vicious indulgence impartially and clearly delineated, will be a counterpoise more than adequate to the sordid and sensual gratifications which philosophers have attempted to justify and to recommend.

At the time when the duties and the doctrines of Christianity are thus placed in the best light, attention must be paid to its external evidences. In explaining the proof that ariseth from prophecy and miracles, observations must be suited to the capacity of the hearer, whose memory will retain without difficulty what he is enabled clearly to comprehend. The mind in early life will dwell with pleasure upon the magnificent preparation that was made for a Messiah by the messengers



sengers who announced his approach. The completion of their various predictions respecting the time and place of his appearance, and the great events of his life, death, and resurrection, is rendered peculiarly apparent by the care of the evangelical historians, who relate particular prophecies at the time when they were accomplished. These, it may be proper just to point out to the young proficient, who will easily enter into the propriety of application\*.

To the miracles which Jesus performed, our observations on the former subject may be referred without difficulty. Attention to the proof of those extraordinary events will however be particularly necessary; because

\* It ought to be observed, that this is the mode of proof which Jesus himself appears to have adopted. Before the conversation that passed in the way to Emmaus, the disciples do not seem to have understood the real meaning of the prophecies. For, after having related the death of their master, they add with apparent incredulity, "We trusted it had been He who should have redeemed Israel." In order to remove this distrust, we are told, that Jesus, "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself." Luke xxiv. 15,—28.

the mind, making experience the standard of its belief, is ready to reject as incredible whatever cannot be brought to coincide with it. The concise simplicity of the evangelical narration, apparently so different from the studied ornaments of the rhetorician, or the circumstantial detail of the impostor, will impress a mind very strongly that is not void of ingenuity. It will be proper therefore to dwell upon the force of this circumstance. The argument arising from testimony it will not be difficult to explain and to illustrate.

We have entered into this part of our subject at greater length, because in the early formation of manners and principles will be found the latent causes of future actions or opinions. And it is in the conduct of education that we shall find a barrier formed, by which the influence of principles that lead to licentious practice may be repelled. Impressions in behalf of revealed religion, as being rational, consistent, and worthy of the Being by whom it is said to have been published, although upon some occasions they may be weakened, will not at any time be effaced. We do not affirm that the effect of those  
impressions

impressions will be permanent and uniform in all circumstances indiscriminately. Of lively passions and keen sensibility, inconsiderate and bad actions will ever be the consequences. The mind likewise, when it is thus occupied, may think unfavourably of a religion to the laws of which it knows that certain actions are repugnant. But this dislike will subside with the passion by which it was excited, without operating effectually to the prejudice of rational approbation. He will be guarded most surely against the arts of sophistical philosophers, to whom their arguments have been rendered familiar. And they, in the same manner, who have been indulged in enjoyments which conduce to happiness, will not reject a religion by which those only are prohibited that tend to impair or to subvert it.

To the tendency of a religious education, carried on upon just principles, and adapted to produce the most durable effects, our subject requires that we should oppose the effect of a contracted and illiberal plan, according to which some of the worst passions of human nature will receive gratification. In a former section, we have endeavoured to show  
by

by what means an education carried on by narrow views, and bigoted maxims, must lead to incredulity. The least reflection must convince us, that, although disapprobation of opinions upon any subject which differ from our own notions is unavoidable, yet that personal hatred or animosity conceived from this circumstance is equally impious and absurd. That this disposition is contrary to that which the genius and spirit of the gospel tends to form, we have likewise evinced at considerable length. What then will be the consequence of an education thus conducted, when we consider it as a counterpoise to the powerful influence of passion and of example? The answer to this question will lead to a detail that may be rendered at the same time entertaining and instructive. It will induce us to point out the steps, by which principles and maxims, that are seemingly opposite to those of freethinkers, yet lead at last to their admission.

He whose mind has been tinctured with false notions of religious truth, and who has been taught to aim at a certain imaginary perfection, will view the conduct of men,  
when

when he launches into the world, not without astonishment and horror. Upon this occasion, the first reflection of a benevolent mind will be that which pity must suggest to it. For, as a consequence of the exclusion of charity from his scheme, a young person will be taught to reprobate, not only the crimes and vices of his fellow-creatures, but even their imperfections and their follies. This last sentiment, however, he will not live long in the world without being compelled to correct. The influence of folly is more general than that of vice, and lies more open to observation. The universality, therefore, of certain practices, and their effect on characters which he holds in estimation, will rectify as a mistaken notion his indiscriminate censure of faults and follies, of vices and imperfections.

Having thus far listened to the voice of reason, our inexperienced scholar will be called to attend, in succeeding circumstances, to that of his passions. Example, as well as natural propensity, will stimulate those blind guides to demand immediate gratification. And their impetuosity will be increased as  
their

their violence hath been longer and more successfully repelled. The discovery, however, of one error in education, will not perhaps produce an immediate and total change of manners and opinions without recollection. A young man, although he will be partial to reasoning that coincides with his desires, yet will not be so ready to imitate the actions of his companions, as he may be to subscribe to their opinions. Of early impressions in behalf of certain doctrines and rules of conduct, one effect will be, that he who falls into immoral practice will not plunge into it with thoughtless precipitancy. He will be solicitous to gain pleas by which the various steps of his conduct may be vindicated. And until he shall have established pleas or principles which have this tendency, his mind, during certain intervals, will be the prey of remorse and compunction. His passions will indeed interpose so effectually, in justifying bad actions, as that very inadequate reasons will by their influence appear to have importance. By assigning such reasons upon all occasions in defence of his conduct, he will at last be thoroughly convinced of their efficacy. As he proceeds in  
his

his course, new pleas will be invented to vindicate new violations of religious and moral sanctions. In this manner, every successive deviation from the path of rectitude will render a return to it more difficult. And in the last instance, the man, unable to reconcile his actions to any former principles, will endeavour to conform his principles to his actions.

In following out this series of observation, we shall discover the cause of a truth of which men of experience have seen many examples. It is, that when men who have been educated according to very strict rules in early life, fall afterwards into a bad course, they become more abandoned and more profligate than those whose education was either neglected, or was carried on with less seeming circumspection. This is the natural effect of an attempt to depress desires too much, which cannot be eradicated, and to prescribe a narrow range to passions, of which the tendency to expand is increased by the efforts that are made to contract and to repel their exertions. Of these, when they have obtained power, the first suggestion will be,

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that the loss of past time ought to be compensated by as much enjoyment as can be crowded into the present. Having escaped, therefore, from his tutors, and having shaken off early habits and maxims of which he discovers the impropriety and inefficacy, a young person will find in licentious pleasure the irresistible attraction of novelty. To passions thus thoroughly awakened, and to the powerful influence of temptation, and of appetite, what can the mind oppose that is of superior or of equal effect? The feeble voice of reason in the present instance, which, at the time when it remonstrates against immoral conduct, points out the absurd and incongruous means that have been used with the purpose of exposing its consequences. Much reflection is surely not necessary to convince us, that, under the present circumstances, such a remonstrance must be ineffectual.

It may here be proper to observe farther, that he who has renounced original principles from a conviction of their impropriety, will most probably persevere in his belief of tenets which he may substitute in their place, and in the practice which these tenets appear to prescribe



prescribe or to defend. This will happen most commonly, because he cannot look back upon any object during the first part of his life, which he will feel either regret or compunction for having abandoned. Religious duties, of which the performance hath been enjoined as a task, he will exchange without hesitation for more pleasing employments, which imagination will invent motives to justify, and which habit will render essential to happiness. We do not however affirm, that this perseverance will be universally characteristical of men whose education has been improperly conducted. The middle course, which leads to truth, may be chosen and followed out with steadiness by him with whom a wrong scheme has been pursued during his years of inexperience. Acquaintance with mankind will nevertheless evince, that young persons, overlooking this middle course, are apt most commonly to fly from the extreme of abstinence to that of licentiousness; and, instead of rectifying what has been erroneous, to shake off the scheme of which some errors have been detected, without examination.

We mentioned a third and numerous class, on the present subject, consisting of men whose minds have been impressed by no religious principles, and who have been exposed without defence to the influence of depraved example. They who enter into the world in this situation, will excite pity in a benevolent heart; and their actions admit of every plea that can extenuate transgression. Yet a mind upon which no impression hath been made is still susceptible of instruction. And if such a mind does not think favourably of any religious plan, there is not at the same time any scheme against which it is invincibly prepossessed. There are seasons in human life at which the man becomes fatigued with enjoyments of one kind, of which the repetition produceth satiety and disgust. During those intervals, he who has any natural fund of reflection will turn his thoughts with advantage to researches that promise to gratify curiosity. Instructive conversation, and the perusal of performances judiciously selected, may fix attention, by opening a field of inquiry that has not been explored. In this case, therefore, the young scholar will bring to his examination, what the friends of Christianity

stianity principally require, a mind unbiaſſed by prejudice againſt our religion, and therefore open to conviction.

But what ſhall we ſay of thoſe, who, far from having been thus defectively educated, have, on the contrary, been taught to hate the miniſters of religion, and to hold its inſtitutions in contempt. To thoſe gentlemen we ſhall make one obſervation, of which the novelty may claim their regard. Of this nature is an addreſs to the following purpoſe.

“ You have always profeſſed to deſpiſe  
 “ men who are bigoted to the maxims of a  
 “ narrow education. You repreſent thoſe  
 “ men as devotees, who have never carried  
 “ their inquiries beyond the tenets of a par-  
 “ ticular ſect, and whom this abſurd attach-  
 “ ment hath rendered incapable of making  
 “ any manly and vigorous exertion. And  
 “ your cenſure of ſuch men is unqueſtion-  
 “ ably rational. Permit me, however, to in-  
 “ form you, that your reproach, in the pre-  
 “ ſent inſtance, recoils upon your own con-  
 “ duct. You are yourſelf the bigot whom  
 “ you profeſs to condemn. For you are de-  
 “ voted

“ voted to principles which you cannot thoroughly have investigated, because your views have never been carried beyond one side of the question. You are as passionately attached to libertinism as he whom you despise is to doctrines which he may denigrate orthodox. In the truest sense of the term, therefore, you are as much a bigot as he is, who reprobates all without distinction who are not members of his own little party.”

This charge may be brought against those men with the strictest philosophical propriety. It is founded in the known acceptation of the term *bigot*, as being applicable to him who is devoted to a certain sect, to whose principles his inquiries are wholly confined. In this acceptation it is equally characteristic of the *zealot* of any persuasion.

We may observe farther on the present subject, that the advocates of Christianity affirm nothing more in its behalf, than that its doctrines may appear to more advantage, when considered as parts of a comprehensive scheme, than when they are seen detached from

from each other, and disfigured by all the arts of ridicule, in the writings of its adversaries. The demand, therefore, of a candid examination to be carried into its institutions and evidences, cannot be censured as being unreasonable.

Thus far we have endeavoured to lay down a plan of religious education, that is accommodated to the circumstances of men of all denominations, and by means of which the powerful influence of licentious conduct upon the choice of principle may be counteracted. Before we conclude this section, it will be proper to obviate an objection to our remarks on this important subject, which may be urged with plausibility. Our observations on the dangerous effect of prepossession in general, will be represented as inconsistent with our attempt to establish prepossession in behalf of Christianity. The mind, it will be said, ought to be at freedom to frame a scheme of principles, from impartial examination of the question before it, placed in all points of view. And of this freedom, prejudices in favour of any particular religion will be represented as subversive.

To

To this objection we may reply, in general, that prepossession in behalf of this religion is so far justifiable, as it contains the most powerful incitements to the love and practice of virtue. Of propositions, granting them to be well founded, whereof the proof may produce bad consequences, it may be dangerous to speak with partiality. These the discerning mind may be left to investigate at leisure, and to frame a judgment according to circumstances. But it is surely otherwise with maxims which have for their object the good of society and of mankind. An observance of these will not only be inculcated with propriety, but a favourable opinion may be impressed of the scheme of which these make a part. To what has been said on the nature and tendency of the rules and precepts of our religion, no addition is necessary upon the present occasion. The consequence arising from their acknowledged purpose, therefore, it is not necessary to deduce.

But this, although a rational, is by no means the only plea that may be advanced in vindication of the conduct which we have recommended as most eligible. It is allowed  
universally,

universally, that the doctrine of future reward and punishment, tends as immediately to check the progress of vice, and to encourage every virtuous exertion, as any mean of which these purposes are the consequences. To this end likewise, the general consent of mankind, to the truth of the doctrine above mentioned, has ever been acknowledged to be subservient. We have seen, however, that reason, which ascertains with precision the nature of moral obligation, failed in the attempt to prove the certainty of future existence, of which it only pointed out the probability. On the contrary, it is clear, that, in the Christian scheme, the purest and most comprehensive moral system is guarded by the awful sanctions of future retribution, which are inculcated by various authors with steady and consistent uniformity. From these facts it will follow, that, in impressing upon the mind in early life the belief of this great tenet, a favourable representation must be given of the only religion of which it constitutes a fundamental article. Christianity possesseth an advantage from the explicit language of its authors on this subject, and

from their unanimity, of which we have already considered the nature and the use.

“ But the fictions concerning which you speak, are chimeras and childrens tales.” Be it so, my Lord S——. You will still acknowledge, that the mind cannot be prepossessed too strongly in behalf of virtue. And so far as the chimeras above mentioned contribute to render men wiser and better, so far they are, in your Lordship’s estimation, the means of accomplishing a most valuable purpose. A point of very considerable consequence will be gained, if the mind shall be brought to balance betwixt the truth and falsehood of those fictions of the Christian law. For the intellectual powers will be improved in examining the proof of this important doctrine, of which, if practice shall be regulated by the *certain* knowledge, it must be impressed by the *possible* existence. It is therefore evident, that the precepts of our religion, explained and enforced with their proper fictions, must be means of principal efficacy to form that character which the friends of mankind wish to prevail universally.

We



We might confirm these observations on the propriety of establishing a favourable prepossession of Christian institutions, by an examination of the political tendency of some rites that peculiarly distinguish this religion. Among these, we have already mentioned the sacrament of the Supper. To our remarks on the design and end of this ordinance in the present point of view, it is not necessary to make any addition \*. When in the same manner we consider the Sabbath, not as an appointment of any religion, but as a portion of time allotted to employments that are beneficial to society, every man of reflection will confess, that, although a good purpose may be gained by representing this as a reasonable and proper institution, no bad consequence can possibly arise from it. By being accustomed, at an early period of life, to discharge the duties of this day properly, a young man may obtain the knowledge of certain important truths which will never afterwards be erased from his memory. To him, therefore, who may still object to the expediency of biasing the mind in favour of any religious scheme, I answer, that this is

\* *Sect. 3. p. 85.*

by no means to the present purpose. The question, as it ought to be stated, is not, Whether the rules and ordinances here mentioned are parts of the Christian or of any other religion? but whether they correspond to the dictates of sound reason and understanding? Should this be the case, an education conducted by those leading principles, will be advantageous to the individual, whatever scheme of principles he may afterwards embrace. Respecting that scheme which is called Christian, he will still be free at a maturer age, to form such a judgment, by investigating its evidences, as is most consonant in his opinion to truth and nature.

Education, as a subject which of all others is the most universally interesting, has employed the thoughts of the most eminent authors in all ages. This great mean of forming manners and character, has not however been contemplated by any writer, so far as I know, in the point of view in which the design of the present inquiry has offered it to observation. We cannot therefore sum up our remarks on the causes of infidelity more properly, than by showing that those which regard the surest barrier

barrier that can be framed against its prevalence, are founded in the nature and constitution of man.

An attentive observer of human nature needs not to be informed, that the mind is tenacious in the highest degree of the first ideas that are placed before it, whether of a pleasing or a disagreeable nature. Those of the former kind, contemplated with pleasure in the first stages of life, become powerful motives of action in the succeeding periods. These, on the other hand, of the latter class, if the understanding has been convinced of their utility, will never lose their influence. Mark a man in the later stages of life, when the powers of memory, of imagination, and even of reasoning, are considerably impaired: You will observe, that the first scenes wherein he has been engaged, and the first principles that have arrested his attention, although they are placed at the greatest distance, will be remembered more clearly than objects that have recently been exposed to his cognisance. The cause of this disparity will be found in the states of the mind compared together at the periods above mentioned,

tioned, and in its various occupations. While the faculties of the intellect are gaining vigour, and while the man, although susceptible of lively impressions, has acquired a small share of experience, the first images that are impressed upon his thought are commonly the most vivid, and produce the most lasting effect. In middle life, when these powers come to maturity, multiplied ideas which press upon him on all sides, leave lighter traces, as they are perpetually varying, and such which are more easily effaced. When the busy scene is over, and when the thoughts, instead of being attracted to new pursuits, begin to review and to estimate former acquisitions, the earliest ideas, as having been deeply fixed, are the first that fall to be recognised. And when the sensibility of the heart, as well as the powers of intellect, are impaired in the last stage of life, the impression of present objects is necessarily transient, and that of recent transactions or acquisitions is speedily and completely obliterated. It ought, however, to be observed, that we speak here only concerning points of which the proof has been satisfying. Doctrines or precepts which are in themselves disagreeable,

able, and which have not been properly explained and recommended, will be rejected more readily in consequence of that disgust wherewith the recollection of them has ever been accompanied.

From these remarks, the important ends that may be gained by rendering Christianity an object of rational approbation in the first part of life, must be sufficiently obvious.

It is much to be regretted, that, in an age in which the other branches of education have received improvement, equal attention has not been given to that part of it which is by far the most interesting and momentous. He who considers the present alarming progress of infidelity, and the dissolute manners of which certain popular prejudices have been productive, must conclude, that if the foundation of future conduct and principles is laid in early youth, it must have been framed, in the present case, of very slight and disproportioned materials. It would be no difficult matter to prove, that, to the disbelief of revealed religion, and to the rejection of its laws, many political evils may  
be

be ascribed, of which the consequences have been felt, and are lamented. Manners universally dissolute are consequential to the rejection of principle ; and, of such manners, history may be viewed as a mirror, which exposeth the effects. But does he, it will be said, who casts off Christianity, renounce, at the same time, all religious tenets whatever ? In reply to this question, I have endeavoured to evince, in the preceding sections, that he who quits the ground of revelation, will find no stability or consistency in the schemes and theories of its opponents. Atheism and scepticism are the two extremes to which in the end he will most probably have recourse. To the progress of circumstances that are so destructive of happiness, a well conducted education offers the most effectual, and perhaps the only remedy. The author's remarks on this subject, in various parts of the present work, will be considered as hints and suggestions which may be followed out with advantage, rather than as parts of a methodised plan, of which the regular prosecution would have been inconsistent with the design of this inquiry.

RECAPIT-

## RECAPITULATION,

A N D

## CONCLUDING ADDRESS.

**A**FTER having taken that large compass which the important subject of this inquiry seemed to demand, it is now proper to pause before we bring it to a conclusion, and to render the reader's view of the whole work clear and comprehensive. The parts of a complicate plan compressed and placed before the mind in an arranged series, will impress it more powerfully, than when these are viewed apart from each other; and will be more readily and distinctly understood.

Our observations on the infidelity and scepticism of the present age, are contained under the following general heads. The first comprehends those causes which an artful misrepresentation of the Christian scheme, and of its various doctrines, may be said to have occasioned. Under the second head, those in-

duancements to the above mentioned purposes are comprised, which have for their objects the abuse of the ministers of our religion, and, in general, of the pastoral office. The third respects, as causes of this evil, the propensities, passions, and faculties of the human mind. Of those, the former are impelled to bad actions by an irresistible impulse. The latter, on the contrary, are perverted to the purpose of inventing arguments by which bad actions may be apparently justified.

We have, therefore, brought together,

1. Causes respecting the doctrines and institutions of Christianity.
2. Causes respecting the clerical office and character.
3. Causes respecting the passions, propensities, and faculties of the mind.

Concerning the first, we may naturally ask, by what means it has happened, that precepts and doctrines, so excellent as those of Christianity, have yet given occasion to the various and contradictory theories of men who are denominated Christians? A specious objection,



objection, likewise, to the truth of our religion, in the estimation of young and inexperienced readers, is, that doubts respecting the truth and authority of revelation, were coeval with the period at which men emerged from ignorance and error.

I have endeavoured to answer the first question, by ascribing the schismatical tenets of men, in the early ages of the church, to causes of powerful and of adequate efficacy. With this purpose, I have explained the manner in which strained explanations of the sacred text contributed to promote the designs of ambitious men in those ages. The pretensions of such men to superior knowledge and sanctity, have likewise been examined, supported by the admiration of an ignorant multitude. Lastly, the state of the world at the time when those men lived, and the injudicious means that were employed to suppress their tenets, have been enumerated as causes that gave rise to opposite theories on the subject of religion, and that ensured success to their authors. In later ages, I have traced the progress of heresies to the period at which Deism origina-

ted, in consequence of their multiplicity and of their extravagance. Upon the whole, it hath been evinced, that no possible form of words can be contrived to convey tenets of various import, of which the sense may not be perverted by plausible misrepresentation, when men are prompted to take this course by motives that have been enumerated. . They, therefore, whose objections to revealed religion are founded in its supposed defect of perspicuity, demand a test, to which it is impossible that any model can be perfectly conformed.

In answer to the second objection, by which the success of infidelity is greatly promoted ; the precepts and the conduct of Christian teachers have been considered as tending to encourage a spirit of free inquiry. This spirit is opposed to that of an ancient philosopher ; and, in general, to the purpose of impostors in all ages. I have endeavoured to place in one point of view, the various motives, which, as soon as men began to think for themselves, directed their inquiries to the authority of the Christian religion. Proofs of this affirmation are  
drawn

drawn from the nature of Christian precepts; from the metaphorical language of the prophets; from the false and contradictory explanations whereof certain passages were judged to be susceptible; and, finally, from the principles and pretensions of the church of Rome. Of those circumstances, the force and the tendency have been particularly illustrated.

Having removed obstructions to the principal point, the great question respecting the intrinsic excellence of the Christian revelation, and the purposes to which it is subservient, has been examined in all its extent. Among a certain class of men, infidelity is not more surely promoted by any mean, than by that which represents Christianity as being the religion of the vulgar, to whose choice and comprehension it is solely adapted. In order to evince the futility of so popular an objection, I have considered the Christian scheme as the subject of scientific research. In this point of view, our religion hath been considered in the four following lights.

It hath been viewed, 1. As containing the  
most

most perfect moral system, illustrated by the most perfect example.

2. As having enlarged the bounds of human knowledge, by communications that are at the same time indispensably necessary, and essentially important.

3. As a mean of principal use to soften the ferocity of man, and to promote civilization.

4. As having tended universally, where it is best understood, to substitute, in place of narrow and illiberal prejudices, enlarged and rational views of the divine government, providence, and perfections.

Our remarks on these important points, if they are well founded, must carry greater conviction to the mind than even the external evidences of our religion; powerful as these are, and supported by the most authentic testimony. For, objections may be made to this testimony, which cannot lie against simple facts, concerning the truth or falsehood of which, the sense and experience of every man will qualify him to judge and to decide. Let us observe in general, that our comparison of Pagan with Christian morality,

morality, and opposition of the discoveries of philosophy to those of revelation, are carried on with the purpose of placing the latter in the clearest point of view. From these, every reader may be enabled to judge concerning the spirit of our religion, and the superior excellence and importance of its discoveries. With the same purpose, I have attempted to evince, that the cultivation of science has kept pace with the knowledge of Christian principles, of which the characters of modern nations exhibit a conspicuous evidence. The conclusion to which our remarks on the principal kingdoms of Europe give occasion, is sufficiently obvious. And from the whole, we have rendered conspicuous the tendency of revealed religion to accomplish the great ends that have been enumerated.

Christian principles, thus represented in their native purity and effects, are exhibited in the succeeding sections as they are mutilated, perverted, and defaced in the writings of modern Deists and Sceptics, by all the arts of sophistry, ridicule, and abuse. It is to these points, that the subject of this inquiry

quiry calls our more immediate attention. For the prevalence of infidelity and of scepticism ought principally to be ascribed to the influence of those arts, and to their successful application.

Of the various hypotheses which those men have framed with the present view, the LAW OF NATURE forms the basis. To this universal law, including whatever is necessary to be known, and comprehending all rational beings, giving full scope to the indulgence of sensual gratification, and prescribing rules that are approved of by the passions, Christianity is opposed, as being a religion of which the influence is contracted, the precepts are rigorous, the institutions are enforced by arbitrary commands, and the doctrines are incredible, absurd, or pernicious. Of this we have produced many examples, which it would be superfluous to repeat.

Our religion, thus divested of all its excellencies, and exposed to disgust and aversion, becomes more conspicuously the object of both, by being represented as having encouraged  
raged

raged the most shocking austerities; and as having gained profelytes, of whose virtue poverty and ignorance were the guardians. It is true, that the author who brings these circumstances together, assigns them, with singular propriety, as causes by which the gospel was rapidly propagated. But on this theory we have animadverted in the proper place. And, although few readers will comprehend the means by which these practices *forwarded* the progress of Christianity, yet no reader will call in question their tendency to *obstruct* its propagation. What then, we may ask, is left in order to support a scheme thus depreciated in the estimation of mankind? Its excellent morality, we may reply, and the discoveries of high importance and utility which it communicates. Those are pillars upon which the fabric of revelation may be said to be erected. And, by loosening these supporters, essential injury must be done to the superstructure. We have seen, therefore, that the patrons of Deistical tenets expose the former, which contain doctrines of an acknowledged unpopular tendency, to ridicule. The latter, on the contrary, they treat as childrens tales, *fixed*

indeed to please the ignorant, but, to the learned, to be objects of derision and of contempt.

It is by these practices steadily carried into execution, that prejudices are formed against the Christian religion, of which men do not attend properly to the nature and effects. Unfavourable impressions of any scheme, by which the love of pleasure is restrained are easily made upon a heart in which this passion predominates. We have seen, that he who chooseth to depreciate certain tenets, either by using the *way* of ridicule, of declamation, of description, or of argument, will succeed without difficulty with young and inexperienced readers. The passions and prepossessions of those disciples, if they have not been watched with strict attention, will leave but little to be effected.

A candid examination of schemes which the adversaries of Christianity would substitute in place of it, is the surest mean of obstructing the operation of the powerful principles above mentioned. In the course of this examination, it hath been shown, that  
these



these schemes are illusive, dissatisfactory, and inconsistent with each other. The friends of reason, and of the religion of Nature, have never yet determined the two important questions respecting the bounds prescribed to the researches of reason in the sphere of religion ; or the truths of which the religion of Nature, as it is called, may be said to consist. Of their repugnant and absurd hypotheses, on subjects which they pronounce to be universally intelligible, examples have been brought in this inquiry, of which young readers, who choose to think on this topic, must feel the effect\*.

That the enemies of religion have availed themselves in all ages, of defamation, and of ridicule on the character of her ministers, is a truth supported by the clearest evidences. And it must likewise be acknowledged, that ridicule opposing the influence of the love of imitation in one direction, must promote its effect in a contrary one. The circumstances that give occasion to both, have been enumerated, particularly in the present instance.

\* *Seet. 5. pass.*

With this end, I have compared the mere scholar with the man of the world, and habits that are contracted in retirement with manners that are formed in society. From this comparison it must be obvious, that the former character may be rendered as much an object of disgust and aversion, as the latter may be of close and particular imitation \*.

A question is suggested by this subject, respecting the connection between the influence of certain manners, and the effect of opinions that are adopted by men of whom these manners are characteristical. In answer to this question, I have endeavoured to show by what means our judgment in the last case is influenced by prejudices that are gained in the first, and to ascertain the degree of their ascendancy. The remarks that have been made on this connection, are confirmed by illustrations of which every reader is qualified to judge †. It is therefore a fact which seems to be consonant to general experience,

\* *Sect. 7. ab init.*

† *Id.*

that he who succeeds in depreciating the professional advocates of Christianity, and particularly in his impeachment of their sincerity, will destroy the effect of their arguments with many readers, whose prepossessions will be transferred to religion.

By what means, then, are efforts deriving their energy from a known principle of human nature, and operating so powerfully to the prejudice of our religion, to be rendered ineffectual? By exposing without doubt the various misrepresentations of the pastoral office and character in the proper light; and by vindicating both from illiberal aspersions. An inexperienced reader will thus be guarded against an attack, of which the tendency is more dangerous, as its real object is more concealed.

With this purpose it is, that specimens have been successively exhibited on the present topic, of the pointed ridicule of Voltaire, the descriptive satire of Shaftsbury, the pompous declamation of Bolingbroke, and the philosophical disquisition of Hume; all employed upon a subject fruitful of ideas to  
men

men of talents, at the same time eminent and strikingly discriminated. From these specimens, and the observations that have been made upon them, young readers who have become unpropitious to the cause of religion, by being dissatisfied with its advocates, may, it is hoped, be enabled to correct a prejudice so ill founded. Just notions of the ministerial profession may be gained, by viewing the causes which expose it peculiarly to abuse. And the weapons employed by the adversaries of our religion, if in the present case they shall not recoil upon themselves, will cease at least to be offensive to its defenders.

But whatever efficacy we may ascribe to the causes above mentioned, as having been productive of infidelity, it is to *the voice within the mind* that their influence ought principally to be traced. In the preceding inquiry, it was therefore necessary to attend particularly to this *still voice*, as conveying dictates of the most essential importance. Effects therefore of a detrimental nature that are derived from this source, are those which originate in the propensities, passions, and  
faculties

faculties of the mind. Its propensities are the desire of singularity, and the love of imitation. The passions which contribute to this purpose, are the love of pleasure, and more particularly of sensual gratification. The two great powers of reason and of imagination, are those to which, in the general course of their conduct, our free-thinking philosophers profess to appeal. The second section of this work is appropriated to the effect of the love of singularity, considered as having operated to the prejudice of Christianity. In this section the author hath endeavoured to place in a just point of view, one cause by which the inventors of religious novelties have been induced to adopt and to disseminate certain dangerous tenets in all ages. A capital point will be gained, if the reader shall be enabled to distinguish, from the observations that have been made on this head, thoughts that originate in the love of truth, from theories which are derived from the desire of singularity. By losing in the last detection some part of his reverence for certain authorities, such a reader will less readily be the dupe of metaphysical subtleties, and of specious declamation. He  
who

who is professedly attached to singular argument \*, will most probably be as much an innovator in religion as in philosophy. In tracing the progress of this fatal desire from slight innovations on the Christian scheme, to an attempt to exterminate the religious principle, its ultimate end will be conspicuous. They therefore who have remarked this tendency, will be guarded against the means of which so detrimental a purpose is obviously the consequence.

As the love of singularity operates with such efficacy upon the professed instructors of mankind, the desire of imitation is a cause of infidelity not less universal among those who are partial to their opinions. In order to counteract the force of this inclination in the present case, I have attempted to ascend to the sources from which its influence on conduct is derived. From this view, we have gained principles by which to estimate the degree of its efficacy in subverting the evidences of our religion. The various

\* See *Hume's Dissert. p. 6. Dedic. and his Dial. p. 228.*

arts by means of which the imitative propensity is rendered favourable to the cause of infidelity among the young and inconsiderate, have been exposed and exemplified in the preceding sections. In fact, the transition from an imitation of certain manners, to the belief of tenets which they who are the objects of imitation appear to adopt, is more natural than we are apt to conceive at first view. I have therefore ranged under four general heads, the means which our modern freethinkers employ to render both themselves and their principles patterns to be copied with attention. Of these, the principal points are considered apart from each other\*. The author's purpose has been invariably to illustrate his remarks on each part by examples, without which, all examination of principles or of opinions must be inadequate.

The love of pleasure, and the gratification of sensual appetite, are causes of infidelity and of scepticism that are too conspicuous

\* *Sec.* 5. 6. 7. are appropriated to the three first heads. Many examples are produced of bold assertions, and affirmations have been produced in the course of our inquiry, to which it is needless to refer.

to be omitted in an estimation of this subject. In the section therefore that is appropriated to this important branch of our inquiry, I have attempted to trace the effect of licentious conduct upon the choice of principle: A detail in which young readers are particularly interested. Its impression will no doubt be more or less permanent, as the images which it presents correspond to those of nature; and as the process is justified or is rejected by experience. This part of the work, therefore, is particularly addressed to young persons who have felt the influence of those powerful principles. And it is obviously with the purpose of doing them acceptable service, that observations have been made on the theme so deeply and universally interesting as is that of religious education.

Of the intellectual powers we may observe, that arguments are addressed to the understanding of readers, as lively fallies, pointed ridicule, and beautiful illustrations, most commonly are to their imagination. As schemes that obtain approbation, must be framed to impress the former of those faculties,



ties, their effects in the same manner are seldom universal or permanent, when no address is made to the latter. Sensible of these truths, we have seen that our modern philosophers appeal alternately to each of them. The professed aim of their writings, is without doubt to convince the understanding of their readers, without the approbation of which, their purposes cannot be accomplished. Our design in this work has not been to enter minutely into their reasoning on the various and complicated points of this momentous controversy. The reader who would gain information of this nature, must have recourse to the writings of those gentlemen, and to those of the apologists and defenders of Christianity. Specimens of sophistical argumentation, however, have been produced from the most conspicuous authorities, which will qualify the readers of these performances, to detect false reasonings of a similar kind. The remarks that have been made on the selected passages, will likewise perhaps contribute to facilitate such detection.

In the preceding pages, I have endeavour-

ed to evince, that scepticism originates in an abuse of the understanding, applied to subjects whereof it is disqualified to decide. On this head it has been rendered evident, that an abuse of the present kind must lead to universal doubt. This must happen either when reason is employed in investigating subjects to which it is inadequate, or when rejecting simple and self-evident propositions, it wastes its strength in the pursuit of whimsical theories, and of metaphysical distinctions. This intellectual power acts then only in its proper sphere, when assuming the truth of certain postulates; it investigates propositions of which the mind has clear and explicit ideas. In our remarks on the nature and objects of Christian Faith, the reader will find the method of probation specified, that is adapted to positions of which we cannot comprehend the nature, although they contain nothing that is subversive of first principles, or contradictory to them.

All that part of the preceding work, wherein ludicrous images, humorous allusions, comments of the farcistical kind, spirited fallies, &c. have been extracted from the writings

writings of modern freethinkers, may be denominated appeals in behalf of infidelity, &c. addressed to imagination. The influence of these addresses, operating upon the desire of imitation, is perhaps more universal than that of any other mean which is employed with the same purpose. For we shrink from whatever is really an object of ridicule, as naturally as we embrace what apparently merits approbation. They who consider *truth*, according to the hypothesis of an eminent writer, as unsusceptible of ridicule, will find, that this *test of real excellence* may be rendered favourable to the friends of religion, as well as to her adversaries. It is in proof of this affirmation, that the author has attempted an application of it to some very singular tenets in the preceding inquiry. He hopes, however, that to such tenets only it will bear application in the present instance. He who can fairly turn the laugh when it has been raised against him, will be pardoned readily, provided he has laughed in good humour. And the forced mirth of an angry or malicious adversary will be as clearly discerned by a penetrating judge, in the writings of such a man, as in the intercourse of life

life it might be traced on his countenance. Of these it is hoped that the preceding pages, dictated solely by the desire of promoting the best cause in the estimation of its author, exhibit no evidences.

*Non tali auxilio, nec defensoribus istis,  
Tempus eget.*

I have now endeavoured to point out, and to explain at considerable length, the causes which appear principally to have contributed to the present alarming progress of principles which are subversive of happiness. In the conclusion of a work wherein the benefit of young readers hath professedly been consulted as an ultimate end, it cannot be improper to address a few considerations to the authors of schemes that are calculated to justify the most licentious indulgence. That many writers who have unwarily contributed to mislead the inexperience of youth, and to promote depravity of manners, have been actuated by motives of which they did not perceive the consequences, is a truth which cannot seriously be called in question. It is well known, that of freethinkers, in the worst sense of that term, many whose principles  
are

are most exceptionable, have exhibited the most regular and inoffensive examples\*. Charity would lead us to judge, from comparing the tenets of these men with their practice, that they estimated the influence of those tenets upon the conduct of others, according to the effect that was produced upon their own. But reflection must convince us, that this standard is false and inadequate. For from the inefficacy of certain maxims to corrupt a cool, dispassionate, or virtuous temper, we cannot surely pronounce concerning their general tendency and effects, without violating every principle of reason and philosophy. Experience is not necessary to convince us, that doctrines that are favourable to immorality, will be acceptable to those who are immoral, and will tend to justify their perseverance. Their tendency to produce this end is obvious, and indeed unquestionable. The numerous class of men to whom passion

\* Lord Herbert of Cheshbury, and the late Mr Hume afford striking evidences of this truth. The former appears to have been equally respectable as a man of science and of unblemished morals. And the latter (Mr Hume), is said to have possessed the most amiable manners in private life, and to have been distinguished by the most inoffensive deportment.

prescribes a mode of conduct which they are deterred from following out by some remains of early principle, will be brought, by a very easy process, to confide in reasonings by which that conduct is vindicated. Of this truth the cause and consequences have been pointed out in the preceding pages, so as to supersede an enlargement.

I cannot, therefore, upon the most attentive examination, impute the attempts of those men to exterminate religion and morality, to any other cause than that which contributes, as we have seen, to ascertain their success:— I mean the influence of a predominant passion. And this, I will maintain, although it may seem to injure the philosophical character of the authors above mentioned, is yet the best account that can be made of their procedure. Ambition, we know, renders the machine upon which it operates, whether we denominate the said machine Hero, Statesman, Patriot, &c. blind to the desolation and massacres of which this supreme passion has been the parent. And in historical narration we see those engines carried forward in accomplishing the purpose of this *conductor*, with  
the

the same regard of consequences which a clock would manifest to a scene of pillage, robbery, or murder, perpetrated in presence of the aforesaid instrument, and upon those perhaps who put it in motion. We may cease, therefore, to wonder at the effects which this cause produceth in the mind of a philosopher, to whom its consequences, seen through the medium of prejudice, appear to be important and beneficial.

But here the question will occur to every reader, What are the consequences of which a philosophical freethinker believes that the promulgation of his opinions will be productive to society? The high panegyrics into which these gentlemen launch respecting their favourite hypotheses, and their encomium in particular on the extent and excellence of the law of nature, of which so many specimens have been produced in this work, suggest the answer to this question. Some observations, therefore, on the *real* tendency of schemes by which revealed religion is set aside, and on the means that are employed with this purpose, may be of use, either to erase the prejudices above mentioned from

the mind, or to place in a proper light the effect of this conduct.

To the remarks that have already been made on the utility of Christian institutions, and on the acknowledged excellence of Christian morals, it is not my present purpose to subjoin other observations \*. Granting the account that has been given of both to be satisfactory, it may here, however, be proper to mention a few circumstances which naturally arise from it. The mind of a good man, although misled by a predominant passion, may be impressed by a seasonable expostulation, which placeth before him the real tendency and effect of that conduct which this passion prescribes to him.

“ If then the laws of Christianity, and many of its institutions, tend to promote virtuous practice, and to advance the interests of mankind, are you, Gentlemen, I would ask, well employed, who endeavour to undermine this fabric, without erecting any structure in its place of adequate excellence and utility? This surely may be said with

\* *Sect. 3.*



“ strict propriety of sceptical philosophers, of  
 “ whom the moderns, like their ancient pre-  
 “ decessors, are employed in contemplating  
 “ objects of which they cannot determine the  
 “ reality \*. The consolations of religion, and  
 “ more particularly of that religion by which  
 “ life and immortality are brought to light,  
 “ whether justly or not, are highly valued by  
 “ many of your fellow men. Let us grant  
 “ that these men are the slaves of supersti-  
 “ tion; that all their notions are chimerical;  
 “ in short, that they are fascinated by spells,  
 “ conjurations, or what you will. The ob-  
 “ jects of their faith, how unsubstantial so-  
 “ ever, tend to render them just, pious,  
 “ humble, beneficent, humane. What right  
 “ have you then to overcast with the clouds  
 “ of suspicion and of dismay, a path in which  
 “ men have proceeded formerly, under so  
 “ much light, and in such perfect security?  
 “ Why should you awake them from a  
 “ dream wherein they enjoy so much satis-  
 “ faction, and of which the effects are obvi-  
 “ ously beneficial? And by what arguments

\* ΣΚΕΠΤΙΚΗ φιλοσοφία, απο του ΣΚΕΠΤΕΣΘΑΙ ΑΕΙ,  
 ου ΜΗΔΕΠΟΤΕ ΕΥΡΙΣΚΕΙΝ. ΛΑΕΡΤ. ΡΥΡΡ.

“ can you reconcile this conduct to any principle of reason or of philosophy ?

“ You profess, Gentlemen, to be admirers of the sages of Greece and Rome. And it is confessed that those men, having established *no scheme of moral principles by universal consent* \*, wandered often in the labyrinth of sceptical fluctuation. Let us however compare, in a single instance, the sentiments of two eminent modern philosophers, upon the most important of all subjects, the immortality of the soul, with those of an illustrious ancient. We shall find, that what the former set themselves to disprove, and to expose to ridicule, the latter indulges as an idea that is pregnant with the highest consolation. We have already seen, that one author puts this doctrine upon a footing with “ the tales of children, and with the amusement of men who play at foot-ball †.” Another would seriously persuade his countrymen, who have been bred in the belief of this doctrine, that, “ while we are alive, we pre-

\* *See* 3. *ut supra*.

† *Shaftesbury*.

“ serve the capacity of thinking, as we do of  
“ moving, &c. When we are dead, all these  
“ faculties are dead with us \*.” On the con-  
“ trary, the Roman orator and philosopher  
“ entertains with transport the delightful  
“ idea of immortality. This idea he wisheth  
“ to cherish as being well founded ; and  
“ should it be false, he desires not to be un-  
“ deceived. *Me vero delectat, idque primum ita*  
“ *esse ; deinde, etiam si non sit, mihi tamen persua-*  
“ *deri velim.* How different was the opinion  
“ of Cicero, on this subject, from that of  
“ your champions Shaftesbury and Boling-  
“ broke ! The illustrious Roman cannot part  
“ with a doctrine of which his own reason  
“ suggested the probable evidence. Our mo-  
“ dern philosophers, on the other hand, far  
“ from supporting so idle and childish a no-  
“ tion among those who have been taught to  
“ receive it, employ all their powers to eradi-  
“ cate a principle that is subversive of en-  
“ larged sentiment, and of unlicensed prac-  
“ tice. Studying perhaps to inculcate the  
“ virtue of humility, they inform him who  
“ is elated with an imagined pre-eminence  
“ over other creatures, and who would regu-

\* *Bolingb. vol. 3.*

“ late his conduct by this pre-eminence, that  
“ the moment at which the vital organ shall  
“ cease to vibrate, will transfer this superiority  
“ to the reptile that is pampered on his spoils !

“ But, leaving those who carry their love  
“ of freedom to the utmost possible length,  
“ permit me to address a few observations to  
“ you who have cultivated the science of  
“ morals professedly with a purpose of con-  
“ veying instruction. You intend to make  
“ men more just, more pious, more benefi-  
“ cent, by explaining the extent and obliga-  
“ tions of the law of nature, than they are  
“ rendered by the rules of Christianity. And  
“ you emancipate them at the same time  
“ from a state of subjection. But what are  
“ the means by which you propose to accom-  
“ plish this end? You will clear away the  
“ rubbish of ancient prejudices, *i. e.* of pre-  
“ judices in favour of revealed religion; and  
“ you will render men diffident, circumspect,  
“ and cautious in all their researches. But  
“ here surely we ought to remark, that, if  
“ Christian laws and precepts have a benefi-  
“ cial tendency, he who shall weaken the au-  
“ thority by which they are enjoined, must  
“ injure

“ injure the interest of virtue essentially, in-  
 “ stead of promoting it. For of laws where-  
 “ of the design is beneficial, the effect will be  
 “ greater proportionally, as the belief of their  
 “ authority is more established; and *vice versa*,  
 “ will be diminished. To all this the advocates  
 “ of the law of nature will most probably  
 “ answer, that, in place of obligation founded  
 “ in a power that is chimerical, they would  
 “ substitute that which is permanent and  
 “ universal. Are you then *certain*, that the  
 “ tenets which you inculcate will have effects  
 “ that are permanent and universal? Cer-  
 “ tain! No surely. A wise man will never  
 “ pronounce with *certainty* of any thing \*.

“ From these observations it seems to fol-  
 “ low, that you would render men wiser and  
 “ better by subverting some principles of  
 “ morality, and by loosening the foundation

\* The great dogma of ancient and modern Pyrrho-  
 nists in all ages. Γεναιο τατα δοκει φιλοσοφησαι το της ακα-  
 ταληφειας και εποχης ειδος επιταγων, ως Ασκαριος ο Αθηρησιος  
 φησι, says Laertius in his life of Pyrrho. That the whole  
 tribe of modern sceptics, from Des Cartes with his uni-  
 versal doubt, to our late ingenious countryman Mr  
 Hume, have adopted the same maxim; is a truth of  
 which no man acquainted with their writings is sceptical.

“ of

“ of the others. And according to the weak-  
“ nefs of motives by which charity and be-  
“ neficence are recommended, will men be  
“ rendered more charitable, and more bene-  
“ ficent. This, it must be confefsed, is strange  
“ doctrine. But to what other refuge can  
“ they betake themselves, who, after having  
“ expelled its ancient inhabitant (Religion)  
“ from the temple of Virtue, would intro-  
“ duce Incredulity at one door of her sacred  
“ mansion, and Scepticism at the other !

“ I am aware, that these remarks may be  
“ represented as tending to discourage all in-  
“ quiry of what kind soever. A tenet, it will  
“ be said, or doctrine, that is false, ought  
“ surely to be exposed in the just point of  
“ view by the friends of truth. Inconve-  
“ niences, it will no doubt be acknowledged,  
“ may arise from this procedure in many in-  
“ stances. But these must be overlooked, as  
“ consequences that are frivolous and insigni-  
“ ficant, when the purpose of detecting  
“ falsehood is steadily held in sight. This  
“ maxim is no doubt, in general, just and  
“ well founded. It does not however appear  
“ to bear application in the present case. For  
“ the

“ the consequences that arise from the simple  
“ detection of error in this matter, are of so  
“ dangerous a nature, that no man ought to  
“ expose the Christian scheme and its various  
“ institutions to ridicule, who does not sub-  
“ stitute in its room something that is better  
“ accommodated to the ends to which it is  
“ subservient. Recommended by the appa-  
“ rent approbation of the majority, and con-  
“ secrated by the revolution of many ages  
“ as an object of the highest veneration, the  
“ Christian religion has obtained an esta-  
“ blishment in the hearts and in the passions  
“ of mankind. Virtuous conduct is rendered  
“ permanent by the hope of enjoying its re-  
“ wards; and vicious gratification is checked  
“ and controuled, even in the most atrocious  
“ criminals, by the dread of its punishment.  
“ A Being self-existent, eternal, immutable,  
“ whose power we cannot resist, and whose  
“ glance it is impossible to evade; this Being,  
“ inflexibly just, and unalterably true, is, ac-  
“ cording to the doctrine of this religion, the  
“ rewarder of righteousness, and the avenger  
“ of perfidy. You cannot therefore unhinge  
“ the foundations of Christianity, without  
“ loosening at the same time all the bonds by

“ which men are held together in the inter-  
“ course of society. You cannot deprive this  
“ Being (I speak with reverence) of those  
“ perfections in the estimation of his crea-  
“ tures, without breaking down the barriers  
“ by which the career of the passions is re-  
“ pelled, without tearing from a virtuous  
“ man in distress his last remaining consola-  
“ tion.

“ To all this you will perhaps reply, That  
“ a considerable part at least of the present  
“ representation is chimerical. At worst, you  
“ will observe, that philosophical disquisi-  
“ tions, calculated for the discerning few,  
“ are by no means adapted to vulgar under-  
“ standings. And of inquiries which are not  
“ universally understood, the consequences  
“ cannot be universally detrimental.

“ Reasoning of this kind is indeed specious.  
“ But the reader will have perused the  
“ preceding pages to little purpose indeed, if  
“ he has not been convinced that it is void  
“ of solidity. From the known operation of  
“ the desire of imitation, I have attempted to  
“ trace its extensive influence on the charac-  
“ ters



“ ters of men \*. Let me adopt the language  
 “ of one of your warmest advocates in an-  
 “ swer to this apology ; language which, al-  
 “ though used with a different purpose, is  
 “ yet strictly applicable to the present. We  
 “ have seen then, in this detail, “ the fashion  
 “ of incredulity spreading from the philoso-  
 “ pher to the man of pleasure or business ;  
 “ from the noble to the plebeian ; and from  
 “ the master to the menial slave who waits at  
 “ his table, and who eagerly listens to the  
 “ freedom of his conversation. Even the  
 “ people, when they discern that *Christianity*  
 “ *is* rejected by those whose rank and under-  
 “ standing they are accustomed to reverence,  
 “ *will be* filled with doubts and apprehen-  
 “ sions †.” Applied to the age of Augustus,  
 “ we have seen that these circumstances are  
 “ false. But to the nature and conduct of  
 “ man in certain instances they bear a just  
 “ and immediate application. From the dis-  
 “ cerning few, as you denominate them, who  
 “ have been taught to reprobate the Chri-  
 “ stian religion, the contagion of example  
 “ spreads among men of inferior knowledge,

\* Sect 4.

† See the note on Mr Gibbon's Hist. Sect. 2.

“ or of defective understanding. Actuated  
“ by the love of imitation, and stimulated by  
“ the impulse of passion, these men are indu-  
“ ced to neglect, in the first stage of infideli-  
“ ty, attendance on the ordinances of reli-  
“ gion; and in the last, to treat them with  
“ contemptuous ridicule. In this manner, the  
“ effect of certain principles, operating from  
“ various causes, and descending through the  
“ lower orders of men by a sure but imper-  
“ ceptible process, becomes universal.

“ It is indeed but too true, that the efforts  
“ which have been made, not merely to sub-  
“ vert the influence of Christian laws, but to  
“ extinguish the religious principle altoge-  
“ ther, have been in a great measure success-  
“ ful. Infidelity may boast, in the present  
“ age, of the number as well as of the rank  
“ of her votaries, and of their pretensions to  
“ philosophical merit. But of this general  
“ prevalence, permit me, Gentlemen, to ask  
“ you, what are the consequences? Has this  
“ law of Nature, on the excellence of which  
“ you have expatiated with so much confi-  
“ dence, produced the effects which you  
“ ascribe to it among those who are con-  
“ formed

“ formed to its unerring standard? Ye scoff-  
“ fers of these latter days, who have succeed-  
“ ed in rendering religion contemptible, at  
“ least in the estimation of the young and  
“ unexperienced! before you enjoy the con-  
“ quest which you have earned, consider the  
“ consequences of which it hath been pro-  
“ ductive.

“ Carry your view into the world. You  
“ will perceive that *the extinction of the religi-*  
“ *ous principle* is loudly proclaimed by the  
“ conduct of its inhabitants. The diffusion  
“ of dissolute manners, the audacity of shame-  
“ less licentiousness, the polluted temples of  
“ impurity, the traces of universal corrup-  
“ tion, announce the dissolution of moral  
“ and of religious sanctions. These are the  
“ blessed effects of triumphant libertinism;  
“ or rather the trophies in honour of THE  
“ LAW OF NATURE, which ascertain the  
“ æra of its establishment. Have not, permit  
“ me to ask, these characters universally pre-  
“ ceded and marked the decline of empire?  
“ Is not their language graven in indelible  
“ signatures, the MENE, MENE, TEKEL  
“ EUPHARSIN,

“ EUPHARSIN, that met the glance of the  
“ astonished Affyrian ?”

The mirror of history is that in which the truth of this remark will be most clearly manifested. An application of it to the present times will be made most successfully by those men who have means of acquiring the most extensive information, and to whom political disquisitions are most familiar.

F I N I S.

## P O S T S C R I P T.

A Gentleman of distinguished character in the republic of letters, communicated to the author the following note, with permission to insert it in the preceding Inquiry. It came to hand too late to have its proper place as a note subjoined after l. II. p. 203. The author, unwilling to deprive his work of a merited stricture so happily applied and illustrated, and sensible that the friends of our religion will see with pleasure that just indignation of which it is expressive, here inserts it in a postscript.

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## N O T E.

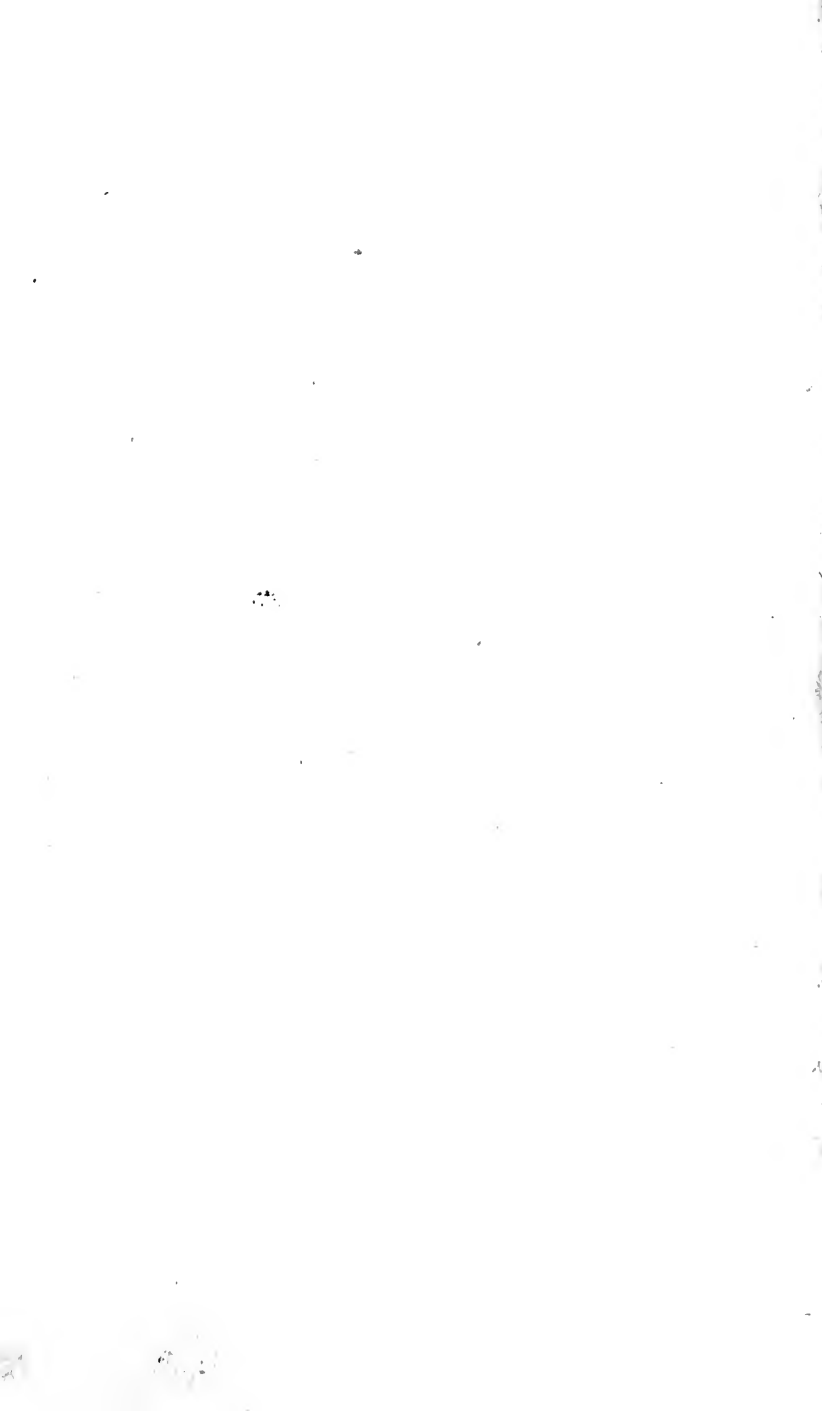
We are favoured with an accidental and brief notice of Christ by Mr Gibbon at note 63. vol. I. p. 369.  
“ Apollonius of Tyana was born about the same time  
“ as Jesus Christ. His life, *that of the former*, is related in so fabulous a manner by his disciples, that  
“ we are at a loss to discover whether he was a sage,  
“ an impostor, or a fanatic.”

Should

Should some future historian thus speak of two writers of the 18th century : “ The German Geistlicher-  
 “ lichus was born about the same time as Gibbon  
 “ the Englishman. His life, *that of the former*, is so va-  
 “ riously related by his contemporaries, that we are at a  
 “ loss to discover whether he was a materialist, a profes-  
 “ sor of philosophical theism, or a Socinian.” How would  
 the friends and admirers of Mr Gibbon relish the obser-  
 vation ? It is probable that they would be displeased to  
 see two personages so different in their opinions, con-  
 nected by the slight association of their having been born  
 about the same time, the one in Germany, and the other  
 in England ; and it is possible that they would not con-  
 sider the awkward discriminating parenthesis as a suffi-  
 cient excuse for having introduced him whom they love  
 and admire into such suspected company.

## E R R A T A.

Page 33. line 2. note, *for* Hence, *read* Whence.  
 Ibid, l. 5. *for* succession, *read* successors. P. 72. l. 3.  
*read* Mendez Pinto. P. 128. l. 9. note, *for* informed,  
*read* enforced. P. 154. l. 12. *for* and *read* a. P. 156.  
 l. 5. *for* placing, *read* placeth. P. 157. l. 10. *for* and,  
*read* of. P. 162. l. 8. note, *for* Hobbes, *read* Herb.  
 P. 184. l. 15. *read* With all my heart. Ye. P. 197.  
 l. 12. *for* latter, *read* letter. P. 232. l. 16. Trans-  
 pose the mark \* to p. 233. l. 5. P. 234. l. 18. *for*  
 an, *read* on. P. 248. l. 25. *read* the cognisance.  
 P. 277. l. 13. *for* when, *read* whereby. P. 289. l. 9.  
*for* is, *read* be. P. 336. l. 13. *read* to be. P. 359.  
 l. 9. *read* conjice. P. 395. l. 23. *for* the, *read* this.  
 P. 401. l. 5. *for* as *read* of.





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